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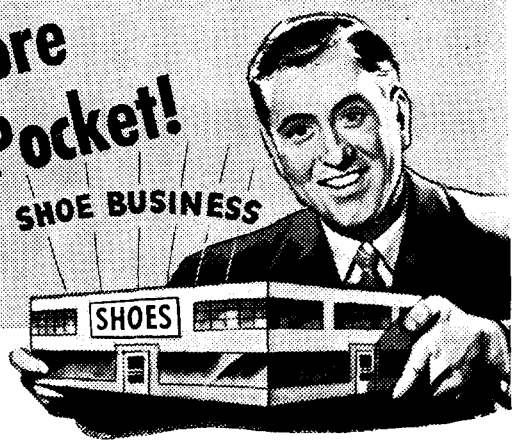

You Don't Invest a Cent! I Furnish Everything — FREE

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Everybody wears shoes. You can start your business by selling a pair to your friend or brother, father or wife—even get a pair yourself. That will prove the fine quality leather—superb craftsmanship—money-saving value—and the unequalled comfort-fit!

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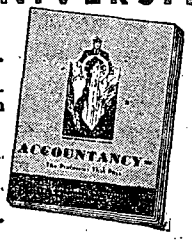

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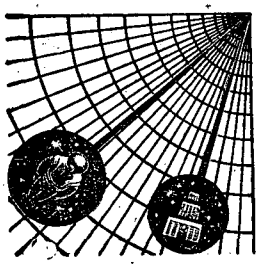

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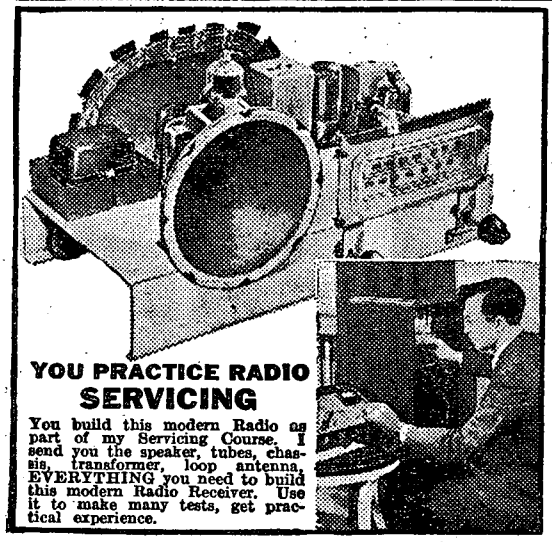

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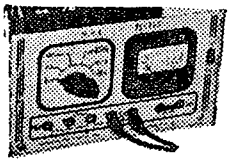

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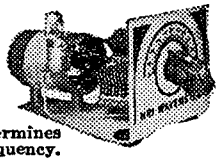

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

WE HAVE several times during the past few years remarked upon the fact that science fiction, as reflected in reader response to this magazine and its companion, STARTLING STORIES, is enjoying a considerable vogue. This rush of readers to newsstand and subscription counter alike began some time during the war and has shown no signs of abatement to date—if anything, it has been increasing steadily.

Since the war is over these three and a half-odd years and readers of the fantastic pseudo scientific story continue to add to their numbers, it seems to us that this vogue or fad or switch of interest—be it one or all of these—merits a more thoughtful analysis than it has received in these pages.

Immediate cause of the thought processes that have resulted in the above and following lines was an editorial in one of the leading publisher's trade magazines at the time of the Toronto World Science Fiction Convention last summer. Recognizing the mushroom-like growth of science fiction in the book publishing field, the writer went on to suggest that there was good reason to believe that the science fiction story, as such, might in part at least supplant the detective and mystery stories in popular estimation.

He May Be Right!

At first glance this statement seemed to us remarkably optimistic. Yet as we mulled it over we began to see that its author, an extremely well known bookman, had carefully thought out his apparently rash statement. We are inclined to believe that he may be right.

If we skip some of the ancient primitives listed by Dorothy Sayers in her famed history of the detective story, which she wrote as the preface to an anthology of same, we find the modern mystery as such stemming from much the same source material as the science fiction story of today—namely the Gothic novel of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

These blood-spattered chambers of horror contained both crime and wildest fantasy—and even, in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," a goodly lashing of primitive science fiction. Certainly the monster, as an android, qualifies under the stf banner.

Vidocq, the former stool pigeon turned prefect of police for Paris, came along early in the last century with a set of "memoirs" which verged on fantasy while purporting to be fact detective stories. Poe aroused interest, especially in France, with his exotic crime stories. Wilkie Collins wrote "The Moonstone" and "The Woman in White" and Gaboriau, the Frenchman, came up with his Monsieur LeCoq stories.

The Rim of Literature

Thus the mystery-detective story continually skirted the rim of literature thanks to the efforts of these and other able practitioners. When, in the 1890's, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle came along with Sherlock Holmes, the field was lying fallow for exploitation. Those that came after him—Louis Tracy, Wallace, A. E. W. Mason, Oppenheim, S. S. van Dine, Sax Rohmer, Hammett, Chandler and the rest—had only to move into niches of public esteem lying ready and waiting for occupancy. Holmes and Watson had paved their way.

(Continued on page 8)

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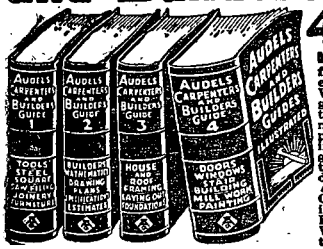

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

Meanwhile the tale of pseudo science was having harder sledding. True, Jules Verne produced some remarkable imaginative works but he was popularly regarded as something of an enjoyable freak rather than the precursor of any recognizable school of fiction. Too much of the stf output of the last century was taken up by those curious juvenile effluvia that culminated in certain of the Tom Swift stories some decades later. They may have been fun of sorts but they certainly did not help to establish the pseudo science story in popular or literary esteem.

Back around the time that Conan Doyle was producing the best of his Holmes stories —roughly fifty to sixty years ago—science fiction had a chance. Following the establishment of the industrial revolution in the western world there was vast popular interest in science. Edison, Bell, Pasteur, Marconi, the Curies and many others were household words.

The Stories of H. G. Wells

H. G. Wells produced a baker's dozen or so of science fiction novels of considerable merit, some of which have reached a near-classic status today. He might very well have put stf up in the same plush lined brackets that the mystery story was then attaining. But he didn't and for one very simple reason.

He never came up with a character anyone remembered. His Martian octopi with their stilt-bearing prime movers, his atomic bombs, his aircraft, have stuck in the minds of those who read the stories. But his humans have shown a lamentable unanimity in fading out. Wells, of course, was dealing with cosmic themes and had little interest in his individuals.

This is unfortunate because, when Wells dealt with humans, notably his Mr. Britling, they stood out in as clear focus as the creations of any of the great modern novelists. He simply wasn't interested in people as individuals when he tackled a science fiction theme. Consequently he failed to give science fiction the grip on popular imaginations that Conan Doyle did for the detective yarn.

Now at last, despite the above failures, science fiction has another opportunity. Due to the developments of the last war—notably

(Continued on page 139)

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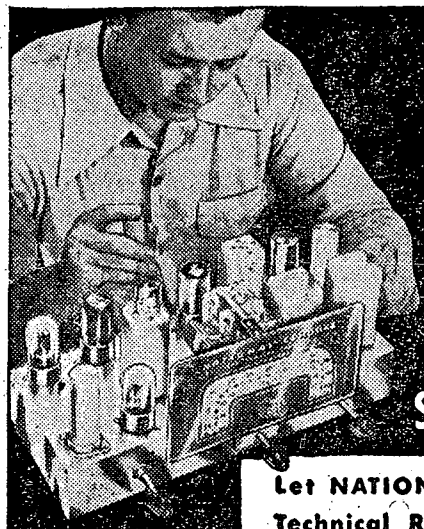

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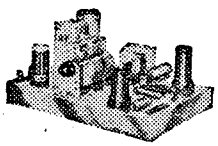

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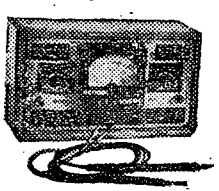

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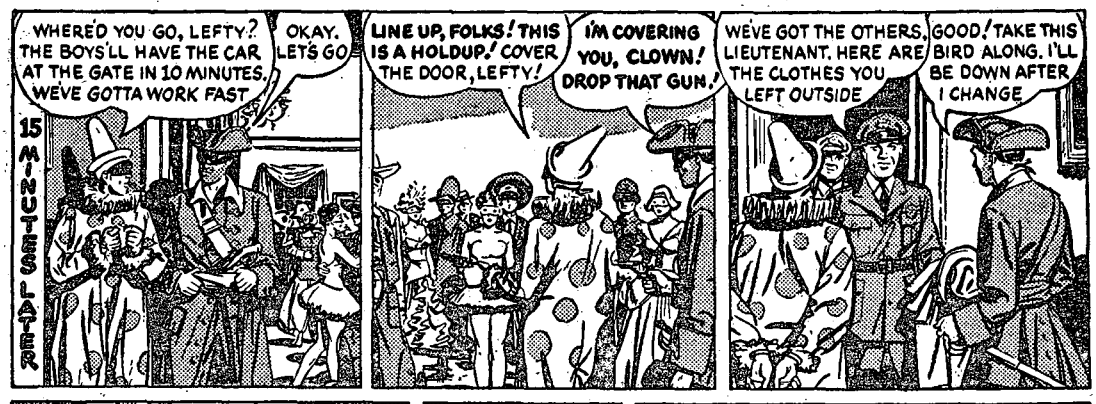
WHILE MOST OF THE GUESTS OF LORIMER DAVIES, WEALTHY MANUFACTURER, ARE ENJOYING HIS MASQUERADE PARTY, "CAPTAIN KIDD" SEEMS TO HAVE ENCOUNTERED TROUBLE...


WHERE'D YOU GO, LEFTY? THE BOYS'LL HAVE THE CAR AT THE GATE IN 10 MINUTES. WE'VE GOTTA WORK FAST
OKAY. LET'S GO
15 MINUTES LATER
LINE UP, FOLKS! THIS IS A HOLDUP! COVER THE DOOR, LEFTY!
I'M COVERING YOU, CLOWN! DROP THAT GUN!
WE'VE GOT THE OTHERS, LIEUTENANT. HERE ARE THE CLOTHES YOU LEFT OUTSIDE
GOOD! TAKE THIS BIRD ALONG. I'LL BE DOWN AFTER I CHANGE

BUT, DAD, HOW...?
LIEUTENANT ROGER'S STORY CAN WAIT 'TILL HE SHEDS THAT COSTUME. FOLLOW ME, "CAPTAIN KIDD"
HERE'S THE CURE FOR YOUR WHISKERS
THANKS, MR. DAVIES
WHAT A SWELL BLADE! TWO DAYS' STUBBLE GONE LIKE MAGIC!
THIN GILLETTES HAND OUT QUICK, EASY SHAVES EVERY TIME

I KNEW LEFTY WAS COMING AS "CAPTAIN KIDD", BUT I COULDN'T IDENTIFY HIS PAL, SO...
GREAT WORK!
JUST THE CHAP TO HEAD UP OUR ATOMIC SECURITY FORCE
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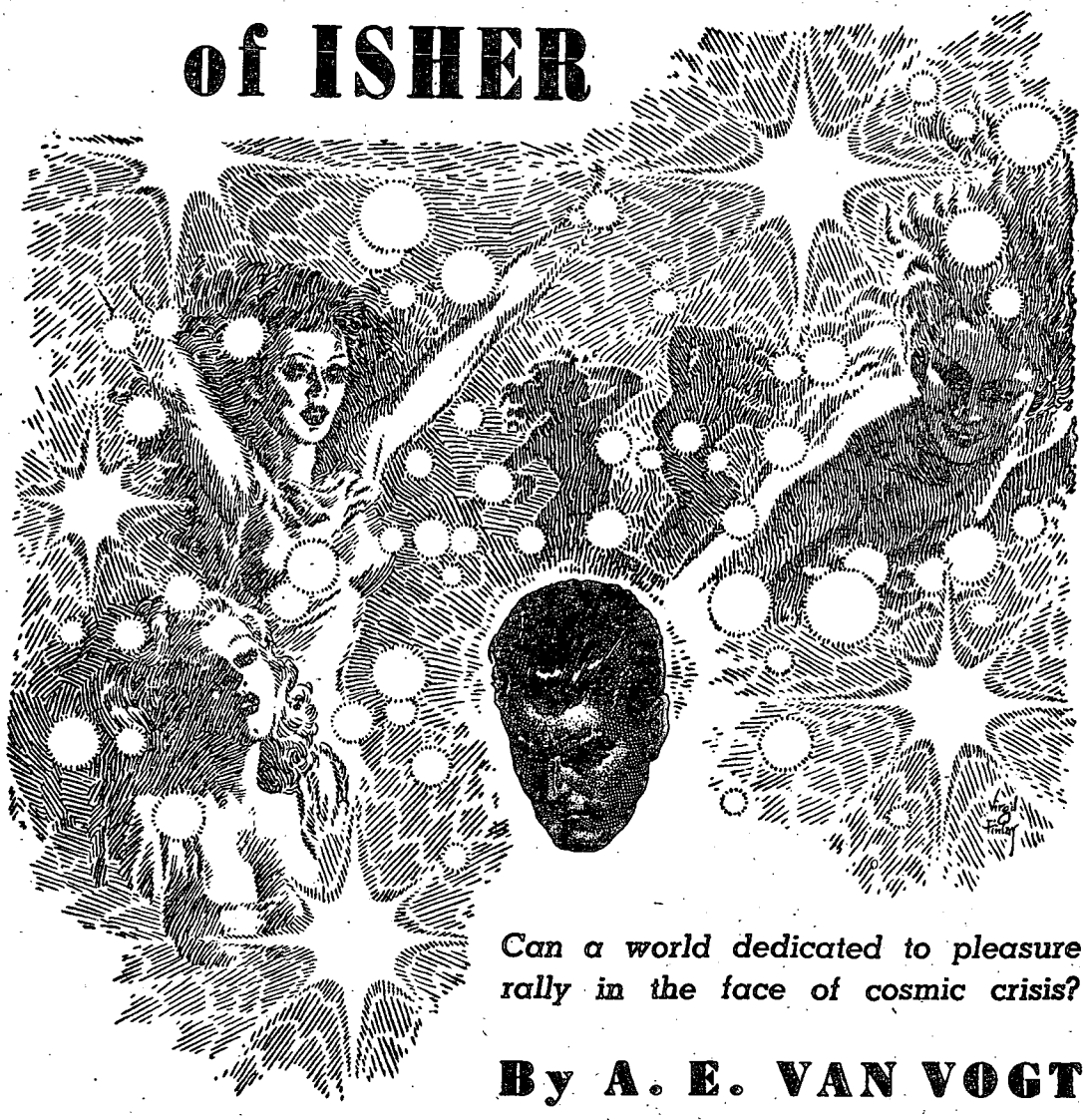
The WEAPON SHOPS of ISHER



Can a world dedicated to pleasure rally in the face of cosmic crisis?

By A. E. VAN VOGT

ON a day in June, 4784 Isher, a reporter from the twentieth century, Chris McAllister, found himself inside a weapon shop located in Imperial City, capital of the Isher empire.

In all time, no man whose destiny it was to be sacrificed so that others might live ever had so great an influence upon the history of life in the Solar System. Because of the way he arrived it was possible to make him one of the "weights" of a time pendulum. At the other end was the gigantic imperial building which housed the time machine itself.

To save themselves the weapon makers

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precipitated McAllister into the time stream to become one end of a seesaw in time. The personal story of McAllister is a tale that is told, but what happened on Earth in that crucial year of 4784 Isher is not so well known.

The weapon makers averted immediate destruction of their organization and yet the dangerous war did not stop immediately. The problem was to convince a determined young

Lucy Rall

empress, somehow, that she must abandon her fatal ambition.

And so, a strange event took place, and among the individuals affected was a young man named Cayle Clark.

CHAPTER I

Country Boy

HE HAD been caught in a trap. Now he was escaping.

Cayle did not think of his departure from the village of Glay as the result of a decision. He had wanted to leave for so long that the purpose seemed part of his body hunger, like the need to eat or drink. Dim that impulse had grown. Baffled by his father, he turned an unfriendly eye on everything that was of the village. But his defiance was matched at every turn by the stubborn qualities of his prison—until now.

Just why the cage had opened was obscure. There was the weapon shop girl, of course. Good looking, carrying about her an indefinable aura of a person who had made many successful decisions, she had said—he remembered the words as if she was still speaking them—"Why, yes, I'm from Imperial City. I'm going back there Thursday afternoon.

This Thursday afternoon *she* was going to the city of the ages, while he— He couldn't stand it. He felt ill, savage as an animal in his desire to go too. It was that, more than his quarrel with his father, which galvanized him into putting pressure on his mother for money. Now, he sat on the local carplane to Ferd, stunned to find that the girl was not aboard.

At the Ferd Air Center he stood at various vantage points and looked for Lucy Rall. But the crowds jamming towards the constant stream of interstate planes defeated even his alert eyes. All too soon his own vast machine glided in for a landing. That was, it seemed too soon until he saw the plane, marvelous beyond description, coming toward him. A hundred feet high at the nose, absolutely transparent, it shimmered like a jewel as it drew up in the roadstead.

To Cayle there came a bang of excitement. Thought of the girl faded into a blur. He clambered aboard feverishly. He did not think of her again until the plane was hurtling along over the evergreen land far below. Wonder about her came then.

What kind of a person was she? Where did she live? What was her life as a weapon shop member? . . . There was a man in a chair about ten feet along the aisle. Cayle suppressed an impulse to ask him all the questions that bubbled inside him. Other people might not realize as clearly as he did that, though he had lived all his life in Glay, he wasn't really village.

But he'd better not risk a rebuff.

A man laughed. A woman said, "But, darling, are you sure we can afford a tour of the planets?" They passed along the aisle, Cayle assessing the casualness with which they were taking the trip.

He felt a little self-conscious, but he too

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grew casual. He read the news on his chair 'stat. With idle glances, he watched the scenery speeding by below, adjusting his chair scope for enlarged vision. He felt quite at home by the time the three men seated themselves opposite him, and began to play cards.

It was a small game for tiny stakes. And, throughout, two of the men were never addressed by name. The third one was called "Seal." Unusual name, it seemed to Cayle. And the man was as special as his name.

He looked about thirty. He had eyes as yellow as a cat's. His hair was wavy, boyish in its unruliness. His face was sallow though not unhealthy. Jeweled ornaments glittered from each lapel of his coat. Multiple rings flashed colored fire from his fingers. When he spoke it was with a slow assurance. And it was he who turned finally to Cayle and said:

"Noticed you watching. Care to join us?"

CAYLE had been intent, automatically accepting Seal as a professional gambler but not quite decided about the others. The question was, which one was the sucker?

"Make the game more interesting," Seal suggested.

Cayle was pale. He realized now that these three were a team. And he was their selected victim. He glared around him to see how many people were observing his shame. Nobody was looking at him.

The man who had been sitting ten feet away was nowhere in sight. A woman paused at the entrance of the section but turned away. Slowly the color trickled back into his face. So they thought they had a pushover, did they? He stood up, smiling.

"Don't mind if I do," he said.

He sat down in the vacant chair across from the yellow-eyed man. The deal fell to him. In quick succession and honestly he dealt himself a king down and two kings up. He played the hand to the limit and, even with the low stakes, eventually raked in about four credits in coins.

He won three out of the next eight games, which was below average for him. He was a callidetic, with temporary emphasis on automatic skill at cards, though he had never heard the word.

Once, five years before when he was seventeeen, while playing with four other chaps for credit twentieths, he won nineteen out of twenty games of showdown. And that ended that. His gambling luck, which might have rescued him from the village, was so great that no one in Glay would play with him.

In spite of his winning streak now he felt no sense of superiority. Seal dominated the

Cayle Clark

game. There was a commanding air about him, an impression of abnormal strength, not physical. Cayle began to be fascinated.

"I hope you won't be offended," he said finally, "but you're a type of person who interests me."

The yellow eyes studied him thoughtfully but Seal said nothing.

"Been around a lot, I suppose?" said Cayle.

He was dissatisfied with the question. It was not what he wanted. It sounded less than mature. Seal, mere gambler though he was, towered above such a naive approach. But he replied this time.

"A bit," he said noncommittally.

His companions seemed to find that amusing. They both guffawed. Cayle flushed but there was a will in him to know things.

"To the planets?" he asked.

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No answer. Seal carefully studied the cards that were down, then raised a credit-fortieth. Cayle struggled against the feeling that he was making a fool of himself. Then, "We all hear things," he said apologetically, "and it's sometimes hard to know what's true and what isn't. Are any of the planets worth going to?"

The yellow eyes studied him now with amusement. "Listen, fella," said Seal impressively, "don't go near them. Earth is the heaven of this system and if anybody tells you that wonderful Venus is beckoning, tell 'em to go to hell—that's Venus. Hell, I mean. Endless sandstorms. And one day, when I was in Venusburg, the temperature rose to eighty-four Centigrade."

He finished. "They don't tell you things like that in the ads, do they?"

Cayle agreed hastily that they didn't. He was taken aback by the volubility of the reply. It sounded boastful like—he couldn't decide. But the man was abruptly less interesting. He had one more question.

"Are you married?" he asked.

SEAL laughed. "Married! Listen, my friend, I get married every place I go, not legally mind you." He laughed again, significantly. "I see I'm giving you ideas."

Cayle said, "You don't have to get ideas like that from other people. They squeeze right up out of your own juices."

He spoke automatically. He hadn't expected such a revelation of character. No doubt Seal was a man of courage. But the glamour was gone from him. Cayle recognized that it was his village morality, his mother's ethics, that were assessing the other. But he couldn't help it. For years *that* conflict had been going on in his mind. Seal was speaking again, heartily.

"This guy is really going to go places in ever-glorious Isher, eh, boys? And I'm not kidding, either." He broke off. "Where do you get all those good cards?"

Cayle had won again. He raked in the pot, and hesitated. He had won forty-five credits and knew he had better quit before he caused irritation.

"I'm afraid I'll have to stop," he said. "I've some things to do. It's been a pleas—"

He faltered, breathless. A tiny, glittering gun peered at him over the edge of the table. The yellow-eyed man said in a monotone, "So you think it's time to quit, eh?" His head did not turn but his voice reached out directly at his companions. "He thinks it's time to quit, boys. Shall we let him?" It must have been a rhetorical question, for his henchmen merely grimaced.

"Personally," the leader went on, "I'm all in favor of quitting. Now, let me see," he purred. "According to the transparency his wallet is in his upper right hand breast pocket and there are some fifty-credit notes in an envelope pinned into his shirt pocket. And then, of course, there's the money he won from us in his trouser pocket."

He leaned forward and his strange eyes were wide open and ironic. "So you thought we were gamblers, who were going to take you, somehow. No, my friend, we don't work that way. Our system is much simpler. If you refused to hand over or tried to attract somebody's attention, I'd fire this energy gun straight into your heart.

"It works on such a narrow beam that no one would even notice the tiny hole in your clothing. You'd continue to sit right there, looking a little sleepy perhaps, but who would wonder about that on this big ship, with all its busy self-centered people?"

His voice tightened. "Hand it over." Harshly, Quick! I'm not fooling. I'll give you ten seconds."

It took longer than that to hand over the money but apparently the continuity of acquiescence was all that was required. He was allowed to put his empty pocketbook back into his pocket and several coins were ignored. "You'll need a bite before we land," Seal said generously.

The gun disappeared under the table and he leaned back with an easy relaxation in his chair. "Just in case," he said, "you decide to complain to the captain, let me tell you that we would kill you instantly without worrying about the consequences. Our story is simple. You've been foolish and lost all your money at cards."

He laughed and climbed to his feet, once more imperturbable and mysterious. "Be seeing ya, fellow. Better luck next time."

The other men were climbing to their feet. The three sauntered off and, as Cayle watched, they disappeared into the forward cocktail bar. Cayle remained in his chair, hunched and devastated.

He hadn't thought of his departure from Glay as being the result of a decision—a decision, moreover, which was not complete. And it did not occur to him now that no decision was ever final unless it included un-

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derstanding of all the potentialities of the particular situation. Not that he would ever go back to Glay.

His gaze sought the distant clock—July 15, 4784 Isher—two hours and fifteen minutes out of Ferd and an hour, still, to Imperial City.

With closed eyes Cayle pictured himself, arriving in the old city as darkness fell. His first night, that was to have been so thrilling, spent on the streets.

CHAPTER II

Weapon-Shop Girl

HE couldn't sit still. And three times, as he paced through the ship, he paused before full length energy mirrors. His bloodshot eyes glared back at him from the lifelike image of himself. And over and above the desperate wonder of what to do now, he thought—How had they picked him for victim? What was there about him that had made the gang of three head unerringly toward him?

As he turned from the third mirror he saw the weapon shop girl. Her gaze flicked over him without recognition. She looked so smart and at ease that he didn't have the heart to follow her. Like a whipped dog he moved out of her line of vision and sank into his seat.

A movement caught his distracted gaze. A man was collapsing into a chair at the table across the aisle. He wore a colonel's uniform of Her Imperial Majesty's Army. He was so drunk he could hardly sit, and how he had walked to the seat was a mystery rooted deep in the laws of balance. His head came around, and his eyes peered blearily at Cayle.

"Shpying on me, eh? His voice went down in pitch, and up in volume. "*Waiter!*"

A steward hurried forward. "Yes, sir?"

"The finesht wine for my shadow n'me." As the waiter rushed off, the officer beckoned Cayle. "Might aszh well sit over here. Might aszh well travel together, eh?" His tone grew confidential.

"I'm a wino, y'know. Been tryin' to keep it from the Empressh for a long time. She doeshn't like it." He shook his head sadly. "Doeshn't like it at all. *Well, what're you waiting for. C'mon over here.*"

Cayle came hastily, cursing the drunken fool. But hope surged too. He had almost forgotten, but the weapon shop girl had suggested he join the Imperial forces if he could obtain information from this alcoholic and join up fast, then the loss of the money wouldn't matter.

"I've got to decide," he told himself. He distinctly thought of himself as making a decision.

He sipped his wine presently, tenser than he cared to be, eyeing the older man with quick, surreptitious glances. The man's background emerged slowly out of a multitude of incoherent confidences. His name was Laurel Medlon. Colonel Laurel Medlon, he would have Cayle understand, confidant of the Empress, intimate of the palace, head of a tax collecting district.

"Damned, hic, good one, too," he said with a satisfaction that gave more weight to his words than the words themselves.

He looked sardonically at Cayle. "Like to get on it, eh?" He hiccoughed. "Okay, come to my offish—tomorrow."

His voice trailed. He sat mumbling to himself. And, when Cayle asked a question, he muttered that he had come to Imperial City ". . . when I waszh your age. Boy, waszh I green!" He quivered in a spasm of vinous indignation. "Y'know, those damned clothing monopoliesh have different kindsh of cloth they shend out to the shticks. You can spot anybody from a village. Boy, I was sure shpotted fast. . . ."

His voice trailed off into a series of curses. His reminiscent rage communicated itself to Cayle.

So that was it—his clothes!

The unfairness of it wracked his body. His father had always refused to let him buy his suits even in nearby Ferd. Always Fara had protested, "How can I expect the local merchants to bring their repair work to me if my family doesn't deal with them?" And having asked the unanswerable question, the older man refused to listen to further appeals.

"And here I am," Cayle thought, "stripped because that stuffy old fool—" The futile anger faded. Because large towns like Ferd probably had their own special brand of cloth, as easily identifiable as anything in Glay. The unfairness of it, he saw with reaching clarity, went far beyond the stubborn stupidity of one man.

But it was good to know, even at this eleventh hour.

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There seemed to be a lot of women around, and Cayle could sense the overabundance of their alluring perfume (CHAP. VII)

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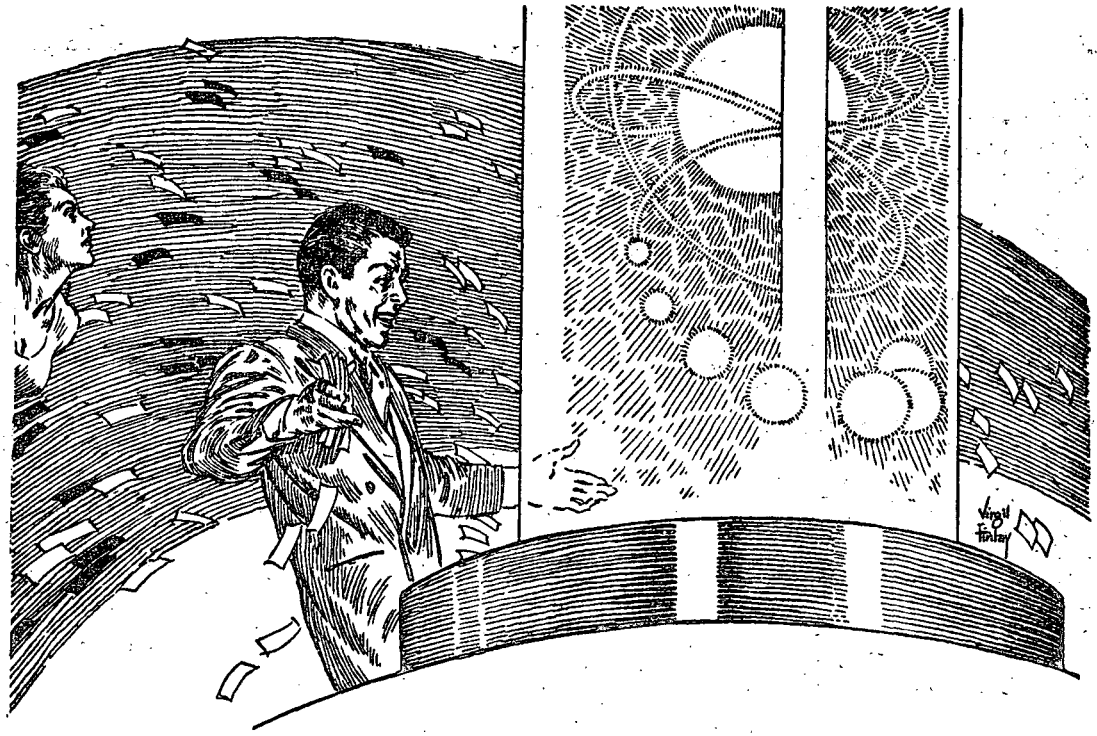

The colonel was stirring. And, once more, Cayle pressed his question. "But how did you get into the Army. How did you become an officer in the first place?"

The drunken man said something about the Empress having a damned nerve complaining about tax money. And then there was something about the attack on the weapon shops being a damned nuisance, but that wasn't clear. Another remark about some two-timing dames who had better watch out made Cayle visualize an officer who maintained several mistresses. And then, finally, came *the* answer.

"I paid five thoushand creditsh for my commission—damn crime . . ." He gabbled again for a minute, then. "Empressh insisting upon giving them out for nothing right now. Won't do it. A man'sh got to have his graft." Indignantly, "Boy, *I* sure paid plenty."

"You mean," Cayle urged, "commissions are available now without money? Is that what you mean?" In his intensity he grabbed at the man's sleeve.

The officer's eyes, which had been half closed, jerked open. They glared at Cayle suspiciously.

"Who are you?" he snapped. "Get away from me." His voice was harsh, briefly almost sober. "By God," he said, "you can't travel these days without picking up some leech. I've a good mind to have you arrested."

CAYLE stood up, flushing. He staggered as he walked. He felt shaken and on the verge of panic. "And I believed I was tough," he thought.

The blur began to fade from his mind. He saw that he had paused to peer into the forward cocktail bar. Seal and his companions were still there. The sight of them stiffened him and he knew why he had come back to look at them. There was a will to action growing in him, a determination not to let them get away with what they had done. But first he'd need some information.

He spun on his heel and headed straight for the weapon shop girl, who sat in one corner reading a book. She put it down when he came up, a slim handsome young woman of twenty summers or so. Her eyes studied his face as he described what had happened.

Cayle finished: "Here's what I want to know. Would you advise me to go to the captain?"

She shook her head. "No," she said, "I

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wouldn't do that. The captain and the crew receive a forty percent cut on most of these ships. They'd help dispose of your body."

Cayle leaned back in the seat. He felt drained of vitality. The trip, his first beyond Ferd, was taking toll of his strength.

"How is it," he asked finally, straightening, "that they didn't pick you? Oh, I know you probably aren't wearing village type clothes, but how do they select?"

The girl shook her head. "These men," she said, "go around surreptitiously using transparencies. The first thing they discover is, if you are wearing a weapon shop gun. Then they leave you strictly alone."

Cayle's face hardened. "Could I borrow yours?" he asked tautly. "I'll show those skunks."

The girl shrugged. "Weapon shop guns are tuned to individuals," she said. "Mine wouldn't work for you. And, besides, you can only use it for defense. It's too late for you to defend yourself."

Cayle stared gloomily down through the myradel floor. The beauty below mocked him. The splendor of the towns that appeared every few minutes merely deepened his depression. Slowly the desperation came back. It semed to him suddenly that Lucy Rall was his last hope and that he had to persuade her to help him.

He said, "Isn't there anything that the weapon shops do besides sell guns?"

The girl hesitated. "We have an information center," she said finally.

"What do you mean—information? What kind of information?"

"Oh, everything. Where people were born. How much money they have. What crimes they've committed or are committing. Of course, we don't interfere."

Cayle frowned at her, simultaneously dissatisfied and fascinated. He had not intended to be distracted but for years there had been questions in his mind about the weapon shops.

AND here was somebody who knew.

"But what do they do?" he said insistently. "If they've got such wonderful guns why don't they just take over the government?"

Lucy Rall smiled and shook her head. "You don't understand," she said. "The weapon shops were founded more than two thousand years ago by a man who decided that the incessant struggle for power of different groups was insane and that civil and other wars must stop forever.

"It was a time when the world had just emerged from a war in which more than a billion people had died and he found thousands of people who agreed to follow him."

"His idea was nothing less than that whatever government was in power should not be overthrown. But that an organization should be set up which would have one principal purpose—to ensure that no government ever again obtained complete power over its people.

"A man who felt himself wronged should be able to go somewhere to buy a defensive gun. You cannot imagine what a great forward step that was. Under the old tyrannical governments it was frequently a capital offense to be found in possession of a blaster or a gun."

Her voice was taking on emotional intensity now. It was clear that she believed what she was saying. She went on earnestly.

"What gave the founder the idea was the invention of an electronic and atomic system of control which made it possible to build indestructible weapon shops and to manufacture weapons that could only be used for defense.

"That last ended all possibility of weapon shop guns being used by gangsters and other criminals and morally justified the entire enterprise.

"For defensive purposes a weapon shop gun is absolutely superior to an ordinary or government weapon. It works on mind control and leaps to the hand when wanted. It provides a defensive screen against other blasters, though not against bullets—though, being so much faster, that isn't important."

She looked at Cayle and the emotion began to fade from her face. "Is that what you wanted to know?"

"Suppose you're shot from ambush?" Cayle asked.

She shrugged. "No defense." She shook her head, smiling faintly. "You really don't understand. We don't worry about individuals. What counts is that many millions of people have the knowledge that they can go to a weapon shop if they want to protect themselves and their families. And, even more important, the forces that would normally try to enslave them are restrained by the conviction that it is dangerous to press people too far.

"And so a great balance has been struck

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between those who govern and those who are governed."

Cayle stared at her in bitter disappointment. "You mean that a person has to save himself? Even when you get a gun you have to nerve yourself to resist? Nobody is there to help you?"

It struck him with a pang that she must have told him this in order to show him why she couldn't help him.

Lucy spoke again.

"I can see what I've told you is a great disappointment to you. But that's the way it is. When a people lose the courage to resist encroachment on their rights, then they can't be saved by an outside force. Our belief is that people always have the kind of government they want and that the individual must bear the risks of freedom, even to the extent of giving his life."

There must have been an expression on his face, a reflection of the strain that was in him. For she broke off.

"Look," she urged, "let me alone for a while to think over what you've told me. I won't promise anything. But I'll let you know my decision before we reach our destination. All right?"

HE thought it was a nice way of getting rid of him. He stood up, smiling wryly, and took an empty seat in an adjoining salon. Later, when he glanced in the doorway, the corner where she had been was unoccupied.

It was that that decided him. He had been tensing again and now he climbed to his feet and headed for the forward bar.

He came upon Seal from behind and struck him a cruel blow on the side of the face. The smaller man was plummeted out of his stool and knocked to the floor. His two companions jumped to their feet. Cayle kicked the nearer man in the groin, mercilessly.

The fellow moaned, and staggered, clutching his stomach.

Ignoring him, Cayle dived at the third man who was trying to get his gun from a shoulder holster. He struck the gambler with the full weight of his body and from that moment the advantage was his. It was he who secured the gun, struck savagely with it at the man's groping hand and drew blood and a cry of pain, followed by a mad scramble to break free.

Cayle whirled, in time to see Seal climb to his feet. The man rubbed his jaw and they stood staring at each other.

"Give me back my money," said Cayle. "You picked the wrong man."

Seal raised his voice, "Folks, I'm being robbed. This is the most barefaced—"

He stopped. He must have realized that this was not a matter of being clever or reasonable. He must have realized it for he suddenly held up his hands and said quickly, "Don't shoot, you fool! After all, we didn't shoot you."

Cayle, finger on trigger, restrained himself.

"My money?" he snapped.

There was an interruption. A loud voice said, "What's going on here? Put up your hands, you with the gun!"

Cayle turned and backed towards the near wall. Three ship's officers with portable blasters stood just inside the door, covering him. Not once during the argument that followed did Cayle lower his own gun.

He told his story succinctly and refused to surrender.

"I have reason to believe," he said, "that the officers of a ship on which such incidents can occur are not above suspicion. Now, quick, Seal, my money."

There was no answer. He sent a swift look to where Seal had been—and felt a sense of emptiness.

The gambler was gone. There was no sign of the two henchmen.

"Look," said the officer who seemed to be in command, "put up your gun and we'll forget the whole matter."

Cayle said, "I'll go out of that door." He motioned to his right. "When I'm through there I'll put up my gun."

That was agreeable and Cayle wasted no time. He searched the ship then, from stem to stern, but found no sign of Seal or his companions. In a fury, he sought out the captain.

"You scum, you," he said coldly, "you let them get away in an airboat."

The officer stared at him coldly. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

Quivering, Cayle walked back to the salon where the weapon shop girl had been but she was still not in sight. He began to tense himself for the landing, now less than half an hour away. Below he could see that the shadows of approaching darkness were lengthening over the world of Isher. The whole eastern sky looked dark and misty as

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if out there, beyond the far horizon, night was already come.

A FEW minutes after Cayle walked away from her the girl closed her book and strolled in a leisurely fashion into a private telestat booth. She locked the door, then pulled the switch that disconnected the instrument from the main board in the captain's cabin.

She took one of the rings from her finger, manipulated it into a careful integration with the government 'Stat. A woman's face took shape on the screen, said matter-of-factly, "Information Center."

"Connect me with Robert Hedrock."

"One moment, please."

The man's face that came almost immediately onto the screen was rugged rather than handsome but it looked sensitive as well as strong and there were a pride and vitality in every muscular quirk, in every movement, that was startling to see. The personality of the man poured forth from the image of him in a ceaseless, magnetic stream. His voice, when he spoke, was quiet though resonant:

"Coordination department."

"This is Lucy Rall, guardian of Imperial Potential, Cayle Clark." She went on to describe briefly what had happened to Cayle. "We measured him as a callidetic giant and are watching him in the hope that his rise will be so rapid that we can use him in our fight to prevent the empress from destroying the weapon shops by her new time weapon. This is in accord with the directive that no possibility be neglected provided there is someone available to do something about it. I think he should be given some money."

"I see." The virile face was thoughtful. "What is his village index?"

"Middling. But he may have a hard time in the city—for a while."

There was decision on Hedrock's face. "In such cases as this the smaller the amount of money the greater the subsequent gratitude—" he smiled— "we hope. Give him fifteen credits and let him regard it as a personal loan from you. Provide no other protection of any kind. He's on his own completely. Anything else?"

"No, nothing."

"Goodbye then."

"Goodbye."

It required less than a minute for Lucy Rall to restore the 'Stat to its full government status.

CHAPTER III

Low-Stake Game

CAYLE watched the face of the woman with careful eyes as she looked him over. *This* decision was out of his hands.

He actually thought of it as that—a decision. The question was, would she spot him as village? He couldn't be sure. Her expression, when she nodded, was enigmatic. The room she rented him was small but it cost only a credit-fourth a day.

Cayle lay down on the bed and relaxed by means of the rhythm system. He felt amazingly well. The theft of his money still stung but it was no longer a disaster. The fifteen credits the weapon shop girl had given him would tide him over for a few weeks.

He was safe. He was in Imperial City. And the very fact that the girl had loaned him the money, and given him her name and address, must prove something. Cayle sighed with pleasure—and went out ot get some supper.

He had noticed an automat at the corner. It was empty but the instantaneous cooking machines served him a deliciously broiled steak with all the trimmings. He would have liked somebody to talk to but then he remembered that city people did not necessarily speak to strangers. And decided to make the best of the situation.

The meal cost more than he had expected. But even that he decided not to regret. After his experiences on the plane he needed sustenance. He went out onto the street contentedly. The neighborhood swarmed with children, and though it was already dark the play went on relentlessly.

Cayle paused for a moment to watch them. Their ages seemed to vary from about six to twelve. Their play was of the group-rhythm type taught in all the schools, only this was heavily overlaid with a sex-motif that he had never seen before. He was startled, then rueful.

"Good heavens!" he thought. "I had the reputation for being a devil of a fellow because a few girls let me make love to them. To these kids I'd be just plain naive."

He went up to his room, conscious that the young man over whom the elders of Glay had many times shaken their heads was real-

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by a simple honest soul. He might come to a bad end but it would be because he was too innocent, not the other way around.

It disturbed him. In Glay there had been a certain pleasure in defying the conventions. In Glay he had thought of himself as being "city." Lying on the bed he knew that was true up to a point only. He lacked experience and knowledge, automatic response and awareness of dangers. His immediate plans must include remedies for these weaknesses.

The vagueness of the purpose disturbed him. He had an uneasy feeling that he was making stop-gap decisions, that somehow he was not comprehending the main decision he must make one of these days.

He drifted into sleep, worrying about it. Twice, when he stirred on the edge of waking, the thought was still there, unpleasant, urgent, a jarring background to his first night in the city of dreams. He awoke tired and unhappy. Only gradually did the uneasiness wear off.

He avoided the expensive automat, eating breakfast for a credit-eighth in a restaurant that offered personal service and featured home cooking. He regretted his miserliness. The weight of the indigestible meal on his stomach did not lighten until he was in the Penny Palace, an ornate gambling establishment on the world famous Avenue of Luck.

ACCORDING to a guidebook which dealt exclusively with the avenue and its games, the Penny Palace owners "have put up glitter signs which modestly claim that it is possible for anyone to come in with a penny and walk out with a million, meaning of course a million credits." The guide page added, "Whether or not this good fortune has ever been achieved the signs do not indicate."

The write-up concluded generously, "The Penny Palace has the distinction of having more fifty-fifty games for the number of machines it has in operation than any other establishment on the Avenue of Luck."

It was that plus the low stakes that interested Cayle. His immediate plans did not include walking out "with a million." He wanted five hundred credits to begin with. After that—well, then he could afford to enlarge his horizon.

He laid his first bet on a machine that pumped the words *odd* and *even* into a

Innelda stared at the structure, chilled (CHAP. XX)

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swirling pool of light. When ten of each had been pumped into the pool the liquid looking stuff suffered a chemical change, after which it would support only one of the words on its surface. All the others sank through a screen and vanished.

The winning words floated easily face up and somehow set in motion the paying mechanism or the collecting mechanism. The bettors either saw their bets vanish with a click or else their winnings would slide automatically to the square before which they stood. Cayle heard the click of defeat.

He doubled his bet and this time won. He withdrew his original stake, and played with the coin he had won. The intricate lights fused, the pump squished, then up floated the light-word *even*. The pleasant sound of money sliding softly towards him assailed Cayle's ears. It was a sound that he was to hear often during the next hour and a half for, despite the fact that he played cautiously and only with pennies, he won just over five credits.

Tired at last he retreated to a connecting restaurant. When he came back into the "treasure room," as it was called, he noticed a game that was played in an even more intimate fashion by the player himself.

The money went into a slot, releasing a lever, and when this was pulled a light sequence was set up. The movement was very rapid but it resolved swiftly into red or black. The game was thus but another variation of the odd and even sequence, since the player had the same fifty-fifty chance of winning.

Cayle slipped a half credit coin into the proper slot, pulled the activating lever—and lost. His second guess was equally wrong and his third. The fourth time his color shimmered into place and he had his first win. He won the next ten straight, lost four, then won seven out of another ten series. In two hours, by playing cautiously, limiting his luck rather than forcing it, he won seventy-eight credits.

He withdrew to one of the bars for a drink, and pondered his next move. So many things to do—buy a new suit, protect his winnings, prepare for another night and pay back the money Lucy Rall had loaned him.

His mind poised, titillated. He felt comfortable and very sure of himself. A moment later he was putting through a 'stat call to the weapon shop girl.

Making more money could wait.

CHAPTER IV

Closed Shop

SHE came on almost immediately. "I'm out on the street now," she answered his request.

Cayle could see what she meant. Her face almost filled the screen. Extens-stats magnified from a tiny image. People used them on the street, keeping them connected with their home 'stats. One of the fellows in Glay had one.

Before Cayle could speak, the girl said, "I'm on my way to my apartment. Would you like to meet me there?"

Would he!

Her apartment turned out to be a four-room affair, unique only in the abundance of automatic devices. After a quick look around it was clear to Cayle that Lucy Rall never did a stroke of housework. What puzzled him, however, was that the place seemed unprotected. The girl came out of her bedroom dressed for the street and shrugged at his comment.

"We weapon shop people," she said, "live just like anyone else, usually in the nicer residential districts. Only our shops and—" she hesitated—"a few factories and, of course, the Information Center are protected from interference."

She broke off. "But you said something about buying a suit. If you wish I'll help you select it. I've only two hours, though."

Cayle held the door open for her, exhilarated. The invitation to her apartment could only have a personal meaning. Whatever her duties for the weapon shops, they couldn't possibly include inviting obscure Cayle Clark to her apartment, even if only for a few moments.

They took a carplane, Lucy pressing the button that brought the machine down. In answer to his question the girl smiled.

"You'll see," she said.

But when they were in the plane she pointed up. "Look," she said.

An artificial cloud was breaking out in the sky above. It changed colors several times, then vividly through it shone the letters, "HABERDASHERY PARADISE."

Cayle said, "Why, I saw their ad last night."

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He had forgotten but now he remembered. The streamers of lights had soared aloft the night before as he walked from the automat to his rooming house. Advertising Paradise. Informing males of every age that here was the place to buy, here the retail establishment that could furnish anything in men's clothing any hour of the day or night, anywhere on earth, Mars or Venus, and, for a trifling extra cost, anywhere in the inhabited Solar System.

The ad had been one of hundreds—and so, in spite of his need for clothes, the name didn't stick.

"It's worth seeing," said Lucy.

It seemed to Cayle that she was enjoying his enjoyment. It made him feel a little naive—but not too much. What was important was that she was going with him.

"It's really nice," said Lucy.

Cayle ventured, "It's so kind of you to help me."

Haberdashery Paradise turned out to be more impressive than its ads. The building was three blocks long and eighty stories high.

So Lucy told him and added, "We'll go to the main sections quickly, then buy your suit."

The entrance to Paradise was a hundred yards wide, and thirty stories high. An energy screen kept the weather out but its doorless vastness was otherwise without barriers. It was easy to press through the harmless screen, and so inside the domed anteroom. The Paradise not only supplied beach clothing—it supplied the beach with a quarter of a mile of surging water tumbling from a misty horizon onto acres of genuine sand, complete with seashells, complete with the rich, tangy odor of the sea itself. Paradise not only supplied ski outfits, it supplied startlingly lifelike mountains with a twisting half-mile of snow-covered slope.

"Paradise is a COMPLETE STORE," said one flashing sign to which Lucy called his attention. "If there is anything you do not see that fits in with our slogan, 'Everything for the Man', ask for it. We have it at a price."

"That includes women," said Lucy matter-of-factly. "They charge the same for women as they do for their suits, anywhere from five credits to fifty thousand. You'd be surprised how many women of good famliy register when they need money. It's all very discreet, of course."

CAYLE saw that she was looking at him thoughtfully. And that he was expected to make a comment. It was so direct that he was startled.

He said hastily, "I shall never pay money for a woman."

It seemed to satisfy her, for they went from there to the suits. There were thirty floors of suits but each floor had its own price range. Lucy took him to the twenty to thirty credit suits, and pointed out to him the difference in weave between "city" cloth and the cloth of his own suit. For thirty-two credits, he bought a suit, shirt, tie, socks and shoes.

"I don't think," said Lucy practically, "you should go any higher than that yet."

She refused his offer of the credits he owed her. "You can pay me that later on. I'd rather you put it in the bank now, as a reserve fund."

It meant he would see her again. It meant she wanted to see him again.

"Better hurry and change," said Lucy. "I'll wait."

It was that that decided him to try to kiss her before they separated. But when he came out her first words dashed his determination. "I didn't realize how late it was," she said. "It's three o'clock."

She paused to look at him, smiled.

"You're a big, strong, handsome man," she said. "Did you know? But, now, let's hurry."

They separated at the Gargantuan entrance, Lucy hurrying to a carplane stop, leaving him empty behind her. The feeling departed, only slowly.

He began to walk, his pace quickening gradually.

By the time he came to where the Fifth Interplanetary Bank sat heavily on the base from which its ethereal spires soared to a height of sixty-four stories, ambition was surging in him again. It was a big bank in which to deposit the tiny sum of fifteen credits but the money was accepted without comment, though he was required to register his fingerprints.

Cayle left the bank, more relaxed than he had been at any time since the robbery. He had a savings account. He was suitably dressed.

There remained one more thing before he proceeded to the third phase of his gambling career.

From one of the public carplanes he had

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located the all-directional sign of a weapon shop, nestling in its private park near the bank. He walked briskly up the beflowered pathway, and he was almost at the door when he noticed the small sign, which he had never seen before in a weapon shop. The sign read:

ALL METROPOLITAN WEAPON SHOPS
TEMPORARILY CLOSED
NEW AND OLD RURAL SHOPS OPEN AS USUAL

Cayle retreated reluctantly. It was one possibility he had not counted on, the fabulous weapon shops being closed. He turned as a thought came. But there was no indication as to when the shops would reopen, no date, nothing at all but the one simple announcement. He stood there, frowning, experiencing a sense of loss, shocked by the silence—not, he realized, that that last should be bothering him.

In Clay it was always silent around the weapon shop.

But the feeling of personal loss, the what-ought-he-to-do-now bewilderment grew. On impulse he tried the door. It was solid and immovable.

His second retreat began and this time he carried through to the street.

He stood on a safety aisle undecided as to what button to push. He thought back over the two and a half hours with Lucy and it seemed a curious event in space-time. He felt appalled, remembering how drab his conversation had been.

And yet, except for a certain directness, a greater decisiveness, her conversation left no dazzling memories.

"It's the stuff," he thought. "When a girl puts up with a dull fellow for an afternoon she's felt something."

The pressures inside him grew stronger, the will to action telescoping his plans, impelling him to swift activity. He had thought—weapon shop, more gambling, then Army District Headquarters, commanded by Colonel Medlon—over a period of a week. The weapon shop had to be first because weapon shops did not open for Imperial agents, whether soldiers or merely government employees.

But he couldn't wait for that now. He pressed the button that would bring down the first carplane going towards District Number 19.

A minute later he was on his way.

CHAPTER V

Empress of Isher

DISTRICT 19 headquarters was an old-style building of the waterfall design. The pattern was overdone, the design renewing itself at frequent intervals. Stream after marble stream poured forth from hidden crevices and gradually merged one with the other.

It was not a big building, but it was big enough to give Cayle pause. Its fifteen stories and its general offices, filled with clucking file machines and clerks, were impressive. He hadn't pictured such a field of authority behind the sot on the plane.

The building directory listed civil functions and military functions. Cayle presumed that he would find Colonel Medlon somewhere behind the heading, STAFF OFFICES, PENTHOUSE.

A note in brackets under the listing said, *Secure pass to penthouse elevator at reception desk on 15th floor.*

The reception department took his name but there was a subdued consultation before a man attached it to a relayer and submitted it for the examination of an inner office authority. A middle-aged man in captain's uniform emerged from a door. He scowled at Cayle.

"The colonel," he said, "doesn't like young men." He added impatiently, "Who are you?"

It didn't sound promising. But Cayle felt his own stubbornness thickening in his throat. His long experience at defying his father made it possible for him to say in a level voice, "I met Colonel Medlon on a plane to Imperial City yesterday and he insisted I come to see him. If you will please inform him that I am here—"

The captain looked at him for a full half minute. Then, without a word, he went back into that inner sanctum. He emerged, shaking his head but more friendly.

"The colonel says that he does not remember you but that he will give you a minute." His voice lowered to a whisper. "Was he—uh—under the influence?"

Cayle nodded. He did not trust himself to speak. The captain said in a low, urgent voice, "Go inside and push him for all he's

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worth. A very important personage has called him twice today and he wasn't in. And now you've got him nervous. He's frightened of what he says when he's under. Doesn't dare touch a drop around town, you know."

Cayle followed the backstabbing captain, with one more picture of the Isher world taking form in his mind. Here was a junior officer who was mercilessly playing for his superior's job.

He forgot that as he stepped out of the penthouse elevator. He wondered tensely if he were capable of handling this situation? The gloomy feeling came that he wasn't. He took one look at the man who sat behind a great desk in the corner of a large room and the fear that he would be thrown bodily out of the 19th District Headquarters evaporated.

It was the same man as on the ship, but somehow shrunken. His face, which had seemed bloated when he was drunk, looked smaller. His eyes were thoughtful and he drummed nervously on his desk.

"You may leave us alone, captain." His voice was quiet but authoritative.

THE captain departed with a set look on his face. Cayle sat down.

"I seem to recall your face now," said Medlon. "Sorry. I guess I had been drinking a little." He laughed hollowly.

Cayle was thinking—That stuff he spoke about the empress—that must be deadly dangerous for a man in his position.

Aloud, he said, "I did not receive the impression of anything unusual, sir." He hesitated. "Though, when I think of it, you were perhaps too free with your confidences." Once more he paused. "I thought it was your position that made it possible for you to speak so strongly and so freely."

There was silence. Cayle had time for cautious self-congratulation but he did not fool himself. This man had not risen to his present position by being afraid or simple-minded.

"Uh—" said Colonel Medlon finally, "what did we—uh—agree on?"

"Among other things, sir," said Cayle, "you told me that the government was in need of officers and you offered me a commission."

"I do not," said Colonel Medlon, "recall the offer." He seemed to be bracing himself. "However, if I did so far forget myself as to make such an offer I have very regretfully to inform you that I have no authority to make you an officer. There is a regular procedure with regard to commissions, completely out of my hands.

"And since the positions are held in great esteem, the government has long regarded them as a source of financial return. For instance, a lieutenancy would cost you five thousand credits even with my influence behind you. A captaincy would disturb you to the extent of fifteen thousand credits, which is quite a sum for a young fellow to raise and—"

Cayle had been listening with a developing wryness. Looking back over his words it seemed to him he had done his best with the material. He just wasn't in a position to make use of Medlon's indiscretions.

He said with a twisted smile, "How much is a colonelcy?"

The officer guffawed. "Young fella," he said jovially, "it is not paid for in money. The price comes out of your soul, one black spot at a time."

He broke off, earnestly: "Now, look," he said, "I'm sorry if I was a little free with Her Majesty's commissions yesterday, but you understand how these things are. And just to show you I'm not a welsher, even when I'm not responsible, tell you what I'll do. You bring five thousand credits here at your convenience in, say—well, two weeks, and I'll practically guarantee you a commission. How's that?"

For a man who owned less than forty credits, it was the runaround. If the Empress had actually ordered that commissions not be sold in future, the command was being ignored by corrupt henchmen. Cayle had a flashing insight into the Imperial Innelda's situation.

She was not all-powerful. He had always thought that only the weapon shops restrained her vaunting will. But the net she was caught in was more subtle than that. The egoism of her own people. The vast mass of individuals who served her will had their own schemes, their own desires, which they pursued with more ardor than they served the woman to whom they had sworn allegiance.

The colonel was rustling papers on his desk. The interview was over. Cayle parted his lips to say some final word—when the telestat on the wall behind Medlon lighted up. The face of a young woman came onto

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the screen.

"Colonel," she said curtly, "where the hell have you been?"

The officer stiffened. Then turned slowly. But Cayle did not need that uneasy reaction of the other man to realize who the woman was.

He was looking at the Empress of Isher.

CHAPTER VI

The Colonel Is Corrupt

CAYLE, who had been sitting down, climbed to his feet. It was an automatic movement. He had no clear thought, simply an awareness that he was an intruder. He was halfway to the door when he saw that the woman's eyes were watching him.

"Colonel," he mumbled, "thank you for the privilege—"

His voice was a sick sound in his ears and he stopped in shame. And then he felt a surge of doubt, a disbelief that such an event could be happening to him. He looked at the woman with eyes that momentarily questioned her identity. At that moment Medlon spoke.

"That will be all, Mr. Clark," he said, too loudly.

It was the loudness that brought Cayle out of his blur of emotional reaction. He was still ashamed of himself but it was a shame of something that had happened, not of what was happening.

He had a sudden picture of himself, tall and well-dressed, and not too bad looking, standing here before a drink-wrecked caricature of a man, and before *the* woman of Isher. His gaze touched her face in the 'stat without flinching. He bowed slightly, an instinctive gesture that made him feel even better.

He had no doubt now of her identity. At twenty-five the Empress Innelda was not the world's most beautiful woman. But there was no mistaking her long, distinctive face and green eyes. It was the face of the Isher family of emperors and empresses.

Her voice, when she spoke again, was her 'stat voice, familiar to anyone who had ever listened to her anniversary greetings—so different, though, to have her speaking directly at him.

"What is your name, young man?"

It was Medlon who answered, quickly, his voice tense but calm. "An acquaintance of mine, Your Majesty." He turned to Cayle. "Goodbye, Mr. Clark. I enjoyed our conversation."

"I said, *what is your name?*" The woman ignored the interruption.

It was so straight at him that Cayle shrank. But he gave his name.

"And why are you in Medlon's office?"

Cayle caught Medlon's eye. A tense eye it was, striving to attract his attention. A remote part of his brain had admired Medlon's skillful earlier words. His admiration faded. The man was in a panic. Deep inside Cayle a hope started.

He said, "I was inquiring about the possibility of obtaining a commission in Your Majesty's armed forces."

"I thought so," said the empress in a level voice.

SHE paused. She looked thoughtfully from Cayle to Medlon, then back to Cayle. Her skin was a smooth light tan in color. Her head was proudly held. She looked young and alive and gloriously confident. And something of her experience in handling men showed then. Instead of asking Cayle the next question, she gave Medlon a way out.

"And may I ask, Colonel, what your answer was?"

The officer was rigid, perspiring. But in spite of that his voice was calm and there was even an edge of joviality in it as he said, "I informed him, Your Majesty, that his commission would require about two weeks to put through." He laughed deprecatingly. "As you know there is a certain amount of red tape."

Cayle felt himself riding a tide that was lifting him higher and higher—because the benefits of this were for him. He felt an unnatural admiration for the Empress—so different she was from what he had expected. Restraining herself so as not to embarrass one of her officers virtually caught in a misdemeanor.

The restraint did not keep sarcasm out of her voice, however, as she said, "Yes, Colonel, I know but too well. This whole rigmarole is only too familiar to me." Passion replaced the sarcasm.

"Somehow or other, the young men who normally buy their way into the Army have heard that something is up and so they re-

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main away in droves. I am beginning to suspect there is a pro-weapon shop conspiracy to put off the few likely prospects who do turn up."

Her eyes flashed with green fires. It was apparent that a basic emotion was stirring, that the restraints were off. She turned to Cayle.

"Cayle Clark," she said in a ringing voice, "how much were you asked to pay for your commission?"

Cayle hesitated. Medlon's eye was a terrible thing to see, so dark it was. His half-turned head seemed unnatural in the way it was twisted. The message in that abnormal eye needed no words. The colonel was regretting everything he had said to the prospective lieutenant of Her Majesty's Imperial Army.

The appeal in this manner was so great that Cayle felt repelled. He had never before experienced the sensation of having a man completely at his mercy. It made him cringe. Abruptly he didn't want to look.

He said, "Your Majesty, I met Colonel Medlon on the Inter-State yesterday and he offered me a commission without any strings attached."

He felt better for the words. He saw that the officer was relaxing and that the woman was smiling with pleasure.

"Well, Colonel," she said, "I'm glad to hear that. And, since it answers in a satisfactory fashion what I was going to talk to you about, you have my felicitations. That is all."

THE screen clicked into blankness. Colonel Medlon sank slowly back into his chair. Cayle walked forward, smiling. The colonel said in a level voice, "It has been a pleasure to meet you, young man. But now, I am very busy. I certainly hope I shall be hearing from you in the next two weeks with the five thousand. Goodbye."

Cayle did not move immediately, but the bitterness of the defeat was already upon him. Out of the darkness of his thoughts came the consciousness that to him had come one opportunity out of multibillions. And he had muffed it by being weak. He had believed that an amoral wretch would be grateful for being saved from exposure. He saw that the colonel, looking quite jaunty, was eyeing him with amusement.

"The Empress doesn't understand the problem involved in ending a system of paid commissions." Medlon shrugged. "I have nothing to do with it myself. I can no more alter it than I can cut my throat. One man would destroy himself bucking it."

He hesitated. A sneer came into his face. "My friend," he said, "I hope this has been a lesson to you in the economics of personal advancement." He finished curtly, "Well, good day."

Cayle decided against a physical attack. This was a military building, and he had no intention of being arrested for assault where he could not properly defend himself. In his mind he marked the colonel down for further attention at a later date.

Darkness was settling over the city of the Ishers when he finally emerged from District 19 Headquarters. He looked up at the cold fixed stars through a mist of ads, and felt much more at home than he had the night before. He was beginning to see his way through the maze of existence on this world. And it seemed to him that he had come through very well, considering his ignorance.

All around him, the sidewalks began to give off the sunlight they had absorbed during the day. The night waxed brighter as the heavens above grew darker. He grew more confident as he walked.

He had been right to attack Seal regardless of risks, and he had been right to hold back on Medlon. Seal was an individual out in the open as he was and basically no one cared what happened to him. But the colonel could call on the power of Isher law.

He had intended to return to the Avenue of Luck until morning. But now having, it seemed to him, resolved his inner doubts, he changed his mind. If he could win five thousand credits and buy a commission, the treasures of Isher would start pouring in his direction. And Lucy Rall—he mustn't forget Lucy.

Even one day was too long to wait.

CHAPTER VII

Army Game

CAYLE had to push his way through swarms of human beings in order to get into the Penny Palace. The size of the crowds encouraged him. In this mass of money-hungry humanity he would be like a piece

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of driftwood in a vast ocean.

He did not hesitate. He had looked over the games earlier and he headed unerringly towards the one he wanted for his final bid for fortune. It would be important, he thought, to gain a playing position and stick to it.

The new game paid odds as high as a hundred to one and as low as five to one. It worked in a comparatively simple fashion, though Cayle, who knew something of the energies, having worked in his father's shop before he was fifteen, realized there was electronic intricacy behind the deceptive appearance of artlessness.

A ball of force—that was the core. It was about an inch in diameter and it rolled erratically inside a larger plastic ball. Faster, faster, faster it darted over the inner surface, until its speed transcended the resistance of matter. Then, like the molecules of force that it was, it burst the limitations of its prison. Through the plastic it plunged, as if there were nothing there, as if it were a beam of light that had been imprisoned by an unnatural physical law in an almost invisible cage.

And yet, the moment it was free, it grew afraid. It changed color, subtly, swiftly, and it slowed. Its speed of escape must have been miles a second but so great was its fear that it stopped completely after traveling less than three feet.

It began to fall. And until that moment of fall, until it almost touched the table, it gave an illusion of being everywhere. It was an illusion entirely inside the minds of the players, a product of enormous velocity and mental hallucination.

Each player had the conviction that the ball was flying straight toward him, that when it fell it would fall into the channel he had activated with a number. It was inevitable that the majority of the gamblers were due for disappointment when the ball, its mission accomplished, dropped into a channel and activated the odds mechanism.

The very first game in which Cayle participated paid him thirty-seven credits for his one. He raked in his winnings with an attempt at casualness but the shock of victory overflowed along his nerves in spasms of excitement. He placed a credit each in four channels, lost, then bet the same numbers again, and won ninety credits.

During the next hour he won on average once in five times. He recognized that this luck was phenomenal even for him—and, long before the hour was up he was risking ten credits in each channel that he played.

At no time did he have an opportunity to count his money. At intervals he would thrust a handful of credits into the automatic changer and receive large bills, which he would press into an inner pocket. Not once did he draw on his reserves.

After awhile, he thought in a curious panic, "I must have three or four thousand credits. Time to quit. Not necessary to win the whole five thousand in one night. Come back tomorrow and the day after and the day after that."

It was the speed of the game that confused him. Each time the impulse came, that it was time to think of stopping his play, the ball would start to whirl and he would hastily drop money into several channels. If he lost irritation would come and a greedy determination not to leave behind even a penny of his winnings.

IF he won, it seemed ridiculous to stop in the middle of the most amazing streak of luck that he could ever hope to have. Wait, he told himself, till he'd lost ten in a row . . . ten in a row . . . ten . . . ten . . . Somewhere along there he had a glimpse of a wad of forty or fifty one-thousand credit notes which he had put into his side pocket.

There was more money in other pockets—and again and again, without being more than blurrily aware of the fact, he would strew large bills at random in various channels. How much he couldn't remember. Nor did it matter. The machine always counted it accurately and paid him the right odds.

He was swaying now like a drunken man. His body seemed to be floating above the floor. He played on in an emotional blur, almost oblivious of others. He did become conscious that more and more players were riding his luck, calling up his numbers in their own channels. But that was unimportant and personally meaningless.

He did not come out of his daze until the ball plunked down like a dead thing in its cage. He stood stolid, waiting for the game to begin again, unaware that he had anything to do with its stopping until a plump, dark man came forward.

The stranger said with an oily smile, "Congratulations, young man, we welcome your patronage. We are happy for you—but for these other ladies and gentlemen we

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have bad news. The rules of this house, which are conspicuously posted in our fine establishment, do not permit luck riders, as we call them. This fortunate young man's trend of luck has been definitely established.

"Henceforth, all other bets must be placed before the 'winner' makes his choice. The machine has been set to react accordingly, so do not cause yourself disappointment by making a last-second wager. It will not work.

"And now, good luck to all of you and especially to you, young man."

He waddled off, still smiling. A moment later, the ball was whirling again.

About the third game thereafter Cayle thought out of nothingness, "Why, I'm the center of attention!" It startled him. He had come out of that oblivion on which he had counted to maintain his security. "I'd better slip out of here as quietly as possible," he decided intently.

He turned instinctively from the table—and a pretty girl threw her arms around him, pressed tightly against him and kissed him.

"Oh, please, let me have some of your luck. Please, please!"

He disentangled himself blankly, the original impulse forgotten. "I was going to do something," he remembered and laid several bets while he frowned over the elusive memory.

He was aware that newcomers were jostling up to the table, sometimes forcibly crowding out the less resourceful and determined of those who had been there first. Once, when he noticed a particularly violent ejection of a vociferously protesting player, the warning thought ticked again in his head that he and this table were now plainly marked by a thousand avid eyes.

He couldn't recall just what it was he wanted to do about that. There seemed to be a lot of women around, plucking at him with their fingers, kissing him if he turned his head, and he had a sense of an overabundance of their artificial-lure perfumes.

HE COULD not move his hands without a woman's bare skin being available for his touch—naked arms, naked backs and dresses cut so low in front that he was constantly having his head drawn down into soft, daintily perfumed bosoms. When he bent an inch for a natural reason the ever-present hands pulled him the rest of the way.

And still the night and his luck did not end. He had a sense of too much pleasure, too much applause at every spin, at every win. And whether he won or not women flung themselves into embraces with him and either kissed him commiseratingly or in a frenzy of delight. Wild music played in the background.

He was twenty-three years old and the attack on every sense of his body overwhelmed his caution. When he had won uncountable thousands of credits the doors of the Penny Palace closed and the roly-poly man came over, and spoke curtly.

"All right," he said, "that's enough. The place is cleared of strangers and we can stop this nonsense."

Cayle stared at him stolidly and the clock of danger was ticking so loudly that his whole brain hummed with the sound.

"I think," he mumbled, "I'll go home."

Somebody slapped his face—hard. "Again," said the plump man. "He's still riding an emotional jag." The second blow was harder. That did it. He came out of his haze with a sharp comprehension that he was in deadly peril.

"What's going on here?" he stammered. His eyes appealed to the people who had been cheering him only minutes before. The people whose presence had lulled him . . . impossible that anything would be done against him while they were around.

He whirled on the plump man—and then stood stock still as rough hands grabbed him and rougher hands probed in the pockets of his clothes relieving him of his winnings. As from a great distance he heard the plump man speak again.

"Don't be so naive. There is nothing unusual about what has happened. All the regular players have been squeezed out, not only out of the game but out of the building. The thousand people in here now are hired for such occasions and cost us ten credits each. That's only ten thousand altogether and you have won from fifty to a hundred times that much."

He shrugged. "People don't realize the economics of such things. Next time, don't be so greedy." He smiled an oily smile. "That is, if there is a next time."

Cayle found his voice. "What are you going to do?"

"You'll see." His voice went up. "All right, men, take him to the truckplane and we'll open up again."

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Cayle felt himself irresistibly hustled across the room and into a dark corridor. He was thinking in despair that, once more, he had put himself into a position where other men decided his fate.

CHAPTER VIII

High Potential

AT TEN minutes of midnight, July 16, 4784 Isher, the door of the coordination department of the weapon makers, in the Hotel Royal Ganeel, opened. Robert Hedrock came out and strode along a wide bright corridor that stretched off into the distance ahead of him. He moved with an almost catlike alertness but actually his attention was not on his surroundings.

Little more than a year ago he had applied for weapon shop membership, his given reason being that he expected a crisis between government and weapon shop forces and that he desired to be on the weapon shop side. His papers were in order, the Pp machine gave him so high a rating in every mental, physical and moral category that his file was immediately brought to the attention of the weapon shop executive council.

From the beginning he was on special duty and his assignment to the coordination department during an emergency was merely a normal step in his meteoric rise to weapon shop power.

Hedrock was aware that a few members of the council and a number of the top executive considered his ascent too rapid and not in the best interests of the weapon shops—that he was even regarded by some as a mysterious figure, though no sinister connotations were intended by the critics.

No one actually questioned the verdict of the Pp machine in his favor, which puzzled him at times. At some later date, he decided, he would investigate the machine much more carefully and discover just why normally skeptical men accepted its judgments without question.

It had proved inordinately simple for him to fool it, lie to it, tell it his carefully doctored story.

True, he had special control of his mind and abnormal technical knowledge of machine reaction to biological processes. There was also the overruling fact of his friendliness to the weapon shops—which undoubtedly helped. The Pp machine, he had been told, had the weapon shop door's unique sensitivity for recognizing hidden hostility. And it's basic structure included the ability, also built into every gun, to recognize and react within limitations.

Like the weapons that would not kill except in self-defense, or under other restrictions, its intricately acute electronic senses perceived minute differences in the reactions of every part of the examined body. It was an invention that had been developed since the last time he had been a member of the weapon shops a hundred-odd years before.

It was new to him. And their dependence on it made it necessary for Robert Hedrock, Earth's one immortal man, friend of the weapon shops, to make sure it was as effective a safeguard as they thought.

But that was for later. It was the least of the problems confronting him. He was a man who had to make up his mind, how soon was not yet clear—but all too soon it seemed to him. The first great attack of the youthful Empress had already closed the weapon shops in every large city on Earth.

But even that was secondary compared to the problem of the endless seesaw. He could not escape the conviction that only he, of all the human beings on earth, was qualified to make the decision about *that*. And he still had not an idea of what to do.

His thought reached that point, as he came to the door marked *Private—Executives Only,* his destination. He knocked waited the necessary seconds, then entered without further preliminary.

IT WAS a curiously arranged room in which he found himself. Not a large room, by Isher standards, but large enough. It was so close to being a 200-foot cube that Hedrock's eyes could not detect the difference. Its most curious feature was that the door, through which he entered, was about a hundred feet above the floor with the ceiling an equal distance higher.

There was a platform just inside the door. From it projected an energy plane. Hedrock stepped into one of the pairs of insulators on the platform. The moment he felt them grip his shoes he walked out onto the vaguely glowing latticework of force.

In the center of the room (center on a height-depth as well as a length-width level)

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seven weapon shop councilors were standing around a machine that floated in a transparent plastic case. They greeted Hedrock briefly, then returned their attention to the machine.

Hedrock watched with them silently, conscious of their intense, unnormal depression. Beside him Peter Cadron whispered, "It's almost time for another swing."

Hedrock nodded. And slowly, as he gazed at the wizard mechanism floating in its vacuumized case, their absorption communicated itself to him. It was a map of time—a map of inter-crossed lines so finely drawn that they seemed to waver like heat waves on a torrid day.

Theoretically the lines extended from a central point into the infinite past and the infinite future (with the limitation that in the mathematics employed infinity was always zero). But after several trillion years the limitation operated to create a blurred effect, which was enhanced by the unwillingness of the eyes to accept the image.

On that immense ocean of time, the shadowy shapes, one large and very near the center, one a mere speck on the curving vastness of the map, lay moveless. Hedrock knew that the speck was a magnified version of the reality, which was too small to make out with the naked eye—and which had been so organized that its every movement was followed by a series of magnifiers. These instruments were attuned to separate sensitive energies and adjusted automatically to the presence of additional onlookers.

As Hedrock watched with pitying eyes both shadows moved. It was a movement that had no parallel in macrocosmic space—a movement so alien that the vision could not make an acceptable image. It was not a particularly swift process but, in spite of that, both shadows—withdrew. Where? Even the weapon shop scientists had never quite decided that. They withdrew and then slowly reappeared, but now their positions were reversed, with variations.

They were farther out. The large shadow, which had been wavering one month and three days from the center in the *past,* was suddenly a month and three days and a few hours in the *future.* The tiny speck, which had been 97 billion years in the future, reversed to about 106 billion years in the past.

The time distance was so colossal that Hedrock shrank in spite of himself and half turned to Cadron. "Have they figured out his energy potential?"

Cadron nodded wearily. "Enough to destroy the planet." He groaned. "Where in the name of space are we going to release it?"

Hedrock tried to picture that. He had not been among those who talked to McAllister, the reporter from the twentieth century. His understanding of what had happened had been pieced together from fragmentary accounts. And one of his purposes in coming to this room now was to learn the details.

HE DREW Cadron aside, and frankly asked for information. Cadron gazed at him with a wry smile. "All right," he said, "I'll tell you. The truth is, all of us are ashamed of the way we acted."

Hedrock said, "Then you feel that McAllister should not have been sacrificed?"

Cadron shook his head. "No, that isn't exactly what I mean." His frown deepened. "I guess the best method is to tell you the whole story—briefly, of course."

He began. "The girl attendant of the Greenway shop heard someone come in and

[*Turn page*]

HUMAN AND ALIEN REALITIES CLASH ON AN OUTPOST OF STYGIA

in

THE ULTIMATE PLANET

A Novelet of an Undiscovered World

By NOEL LOOMIS

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went out to attend to him. The customer was a queer looking chap in outlandish clothes. It turned out that he was a newspaper reporter from the twentieth century A.D.

"He was so obviously disconcerted, so fascinated by the showcases with their energy guns. And he gave an account of a weapon shop having appeared in a street in the little city in which he lived. I can imagine the sensation it caused but the truth is that everybody thought it was an illusion of some kind.

"It seemed solid, of course. But when the police tried to open the door, naturally it wouldn't open. McAllister, with a reporter's curiosity, finally tried the door himself. For him, of course—he not being a police or government official—it opened immediately. He went inside.

"He admitted to the attendant experiencing a sense of tension as he crossed the threshold and, though he didn't know it, it was at that moment that he picked up the first measure of time-energy, the equivalent of approximately seven thousand years—his weight being the other factor.

"When the attendant told her father—who was in charge of the shop—what had occurred, he realized immediately that something was wrong. In a few minutes he had verified that the shop was being subjected to titanic energy pressure. He discovered that the source of the energy was the huge government building on an adjoining street. He immediately called the weapon makers into council.

"By the time we arrived on the scene a swift decision was necessary. McAllister had enough time energy locked up in his body to destroy the entire city—that is if he ever stepped outside of our insulated shop without himself being insulated.

"Meanwhile, the pressure from the government building against our shop continued unabated. At any moment it might succeed in precipitating the shop itself into the time stream, and there was reason to believe that other attacks would be made at any moment on our shops everywhere. No one could guess what the result would be.

"To cut a long story short we saw a way to gain time by focussing the energy of the building upon McAllister and tossing him back into his own time. We could do this by putting him into an insulated space suit which would prevent him from exploding until we could develop a mechanism for that purpose.

"We knew that he would seesaw back and forth in time, shifting the government building and its energies out of this space-time area."

CADRON shook his head gloomily. "I still don't see what else we could have done. We were compelled to act swiftly in a field where no great knowledge is available, and the fact that we merely got out of the frying pan and into the fire was just our hard luck. But personally I feel very badly about the whole thing."

"Do you think McAllister is still alive?" Hedrock asked.

"Oh, yes. The suit into which we put him was one of our supers, complete with an eight-ring food-making device, and there's a cup in it that's always full of water. The other facilities are equally automatic."

He smiled a twisted smile. "We had an idea, completely false as it turned out, that we could save him at some later date."

"I see," said Hedrock. He felt depressed. It was unfortunate but all the decisions had been made before he had even heard of the danger. Here was the post-continuity.

The newsman was now the juggernaut of juggernauts. In all the universe there had never been anything like the power that was accumulating, swing by swing, in his body. Released, the explosion would rock the fabric of space. All time would sigh to its echoes and the energy tensions that created the illusion of matter might collapse before the strain.

"What's the latest about the building?" Hedrock asked.

Cadron was more cheerful. "It's still well within its critical limits. We've got to make our decision before it reaches the danger stage."

Hedrock was silent. The matter of what the decision should be was a sore point with him, who was obviously not going to be asked. He said finally, "What about the men who are working on the problem of slowing the swings and bringing the seesaw back this way?"

Another man answered that. "The research is abandoned. Science Four thousand seven hundred and eighty-four has no answer. We're lucky enough to have made one of our shops the fulcrum. We can set off the explosion anywhere in the past or future. But

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which? and when? Particularly when?"

The shadows on that cartograph made no movement, gave no sign. *Their* time of action was not yet.

CHAPTER IX

In Camera

THE strain attendant on watching another swing faded. The men were turning away from the map, and there was a murmur of conversation. Somebody said something about using the opportunity to acquire all the possible data on time travel. Councillor Kendlon remarked that the body's accumulation of energy was fairly convincing proof that time travel would never be popular.

It was Dresley, the precise, the orderly who finally remarked, "Gentlemen, we are here as delegates of the Council to listen to Mr. Hedrock's report of the counterattack against the Empress.

"In his report some weeks ago he was able to give us administrative details. And you will recall that we found his organization set-up to be efficient in the extreme. Mr. Hedrock, will you now bring us up to date?"

Hedrock was thinking intently. The problem—to make up his own mind about the see-saw, then enforce his will upon his nominal superiors, all without giving himself away Difficult? The potentialities were nightmarish. Uneasily he turned his attention to the men.

He began succinctly: "Since the first directive was given me we have established one thousand two hundred and forty-two new shops, primarily in small villages, and three thousand eight hundred and nine contracts have been established, however tenuous in some cases, with imperial government personnel, both military and civil."

He explained briefly his system of classifying the various individuals into groups on the basis of vocation, degree of importance and, what was more important, pitch of enthusiasm for the venture into which the Empress had precipitated her adherents.

"From three scientists," said Hedrock, "who regard the weapon shops as an integral part of Isher civilization, we gained in the first ten days the secret of the science behind the time-energy machine in so far as that science is known to the government.

"We discovered that, of the four generals in charge of the enterprise, two were opposed to it from the beginning, a third was won over when the building disappeared—but the fourth, General Doocar, the man in charge, unfortunately will not abandon the attack until she does. He is an Empress man in the sense of personal loyalty transcending his own feelings and opinions.

He paused, expecting them to comment. But no one said anything. Which was actually the most favorable response of all.

Hedrock continued, "Some thousands of officers have deserted the Imperial forces, but only one member of the Imperial Council, Prince del Curtin, openly opposed the attack after the execution of Banton Vickers, who, as you know, criticized the whole plan. And the prince's method of disapproval has been to withdraw from the palace while the attack is in progress.

"Which brings us," said Hedrock, "to the Empress herself."

He summarized her character for them. The glorious Innelda, an orphan since her eleventh birthday, had been crowned when she was eighteen and was now twenty-five.

"An age," said Hedrock grimly, "which is an in between stage in the development of the animal man to human man levels."

He saw that they were puzzled by his reiteration of facts they all knew. But he had no intention of curtailing his remarks. He had his own formula for defeating the Empress and he wanted to state it at least once in as skilful a fashion as possible.

"At twenty-five," he shrugged, "our Innelda is emotional, unstable, brilliant, implacable, impatient of restrictions on her desires and just a bit unwilling to grow up. As the thousands of reports came in, it seemed to me finally that our best method of dealing with such a person was to leave openings, so that she could withdraw gracefully when the crisis came."

HE LOOKED around, questioningly. He was keenly aware that, with these men, he dared not try to put his ideas over in a disguised form.

He said frankly, "I hope that Council members will not take it amiss if I recommend for their consideration the following basic tactic. I am counting on some opportunity occurring, of which we can take advantage and so bring her whole war machine

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to a stop. My assumption is that, once it has stopped, the Empress will busy herself with other matters and conveniently forget all about the war she started."

Hedrock paused to give weight to his next words. "My staff and I will watch anxiously for the opportunity and will call your attention to anytihng that seems to have possibilities. And now, are there any questions?"

The first few were minor. Then a man said, "Have you any notion as to what form this so-called opportunity will take?"

Hedrock shook his head. "None."

"This is merely a formula?"

"It is a formula," said Hedrock, "based on my study of the Empress' character."

"Don't you think you had better leave such studies to the Pp machine experts and to the No-men?"

"I examined all the weapon shop data on the lady before offering my suggestion."

"Still," said the man, "it is up to the elected Council to make decisions in such matters."

Hedrock did not back down. "I have made a suggestion," he said, "not a decision."

The man said nothing more. But Hedrock had his picture of a Council of very human members, jealous of their prerogatives. These people would not easily accept his decision, when he finally made it, on the problem of the seesaw drama that was being played to its still undetermined conclusion in ever remoter bends of time.

He saw that his audience was becoming restless. Eyes turned involuntarily toward the time map and several men glanced anxiously at their watches. Hastily Hedrock withdrew from the room with its almost invisible energy floors. Watching that pendulum could become a drug. The brain itself would be weakened by the strain of attending a mechanism which recorded the spasms of real bodies in their movements through time tiself.

It was bad enough to know that the building and the man were swinging steadily back and forth.

He arrived back in his office just in time to catch a 'stat call-up from Lucy Rall.

". . . in spite of my efforts," she said, "I was forced out of the Penny Palace. And when the doors shut I knew what was going to happen. I'm afraid he was taken to one of the houses of illusion, and you know what that means."

Hedrock nodded thoughtfully. He noted sharply that the girl seemed disturbed by her experience.

"Among other things," he said slowly, "the illusion energies have some qualifying effect on callidity. The nature of the modification cannot be determined without subsequent measurement but it can be stated with reasonable certainty that his luck will never again take the direction of success at gambling."

He had delayed his reaction while he examined her face. Now he said with decision, "It is unfortunate that Clark has fallen prey to all these pitfalls of the city so easily. But since he was never more than a long-run possibility we can let him go without regret, particularly—and this cannot be stressed too often—as even the slightest interference in the natural progression of his life would cause later suspicion that would nullify any good he might do us.

"You may accordingly consider yourself detached from him. Further instructions will be given you in due course." He paused. "What's the matter, Lucy? Got an emotional fixation on him?"

Her expression left no doubt of it. Hedrock pressed on quietly, "When did you discover it?"

WHATEVER resistance had been in her, whatever fear of discovery, was gone. "It was when those other women were kissing him. You mustn't think," she added hastily, "that disturbed me. He'll go through quite a lot of it before he settles down."

"Not necessarily," said Hedrock earnestly. "You'll have to resign yourself to the house of illusion but it has been my observation that a fair percentage of men emerge from such an experience, hard as steel in some respects but rather weary of worldliness."

He realized from her face that he had said enough. The groundwork for her future acsults in the natural course of events. He smiled a friendly smile. "That's all for now, Lucy. Don't let it get you down."

Her image and his faded from the screen in a flash.

Robert Hedrock glanced out of the door of his office several times during the next hour. At first the corridors seemed very busy. Gradually, the activity died down and shortly after midnight, the corridor was clear.

He acted now with decision but without

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haste. From a wall safe he took the microfilm plans of the time control machine—the one in the room where he had talked to the weapon shop councilors a little more than an hour earlier.

He had requested Information Center to send them to him and they had done so without comment. There was nothing unusual in their compliance. As head of the coordination department he had access to all the scientific knowledge of the weapon shops.

He even had an explanation as to why he wanted the plans—in the event that he were asked. He wanted to study them—so his story would go—in the hope that some solution would suggest itself. But his reasons were private and his purpose personal.

With the films in his pocket he headed along the corridor toward the nearest stairway. Five flights he went down and came to a section of the Hotel Royal Ganeel that was not occupied by the weapon shops. He unlocked an apartment door, went inside and closed the door behind him.

As befitted an executive of the weapon shops, it was an imposing suite—five rooms and a tremendous library. It was to the library that he went. He closed and locked the door, then carefully examined the place for spying devices. There were none, which was what he expected. As far as he knew he was not under suspicion. But he never took unnecessary chances.

Swiftly he held one of the rings on his finger against an ordinary locking electric socket. A loop of metal slid out. He inserted his finger into the loop and pulled.

What happened in that moment was an ordinary enough weapon shop phenomenon. He was transmitted by a weapon shop matter transmitter a distance of about eleven hundred miles into one of his numerous laboratories. What was out of ordinary about the action was that the presence of the transmitter was not known to the weapon shop council. The laboratory had for centuries been one of his many closely guarded secret retreats.

He decided that he could safely remain an hour. But that all he could hope to do in one night was to make another print of the microfilm. Building a duplicate machine would require many visits such as this.

As it turned out he had time to make an extra print of the plans. Very carefully he put the additional copy into a vault filing case, there to join the tens of thousands of other diagrams and plans to which, over a period of several thousand years, he had given an AA priority.

At the end of the hour Earth's one immortal man, founder of the weapon shops, possessor of secrets known to no other living human being, returned to the library of his apartment in the Hotel Royal Ganeel.

Presently he was back in his office, five flights farther up.

CHAPTER X

Lucy on the Prowl

LUCY RALL emerged from the government state booth, and she was hurrying through an alcove when she caught a glimpse of herself in an energy mirror. She stopped. The outside lights beckoned. The sidewalks were aglow with a brightness that defied the night. But she stood there in front of the reverse image of herself and stared at her pale face and tensed eyes.

She had always thought herself good looking but the face that confronted her was too drawn to be pretty. She thought, "Is *that* what Mr. Hedrock saw?"

Out on the street, finally, she walked uncertainly along. She had made her call from a booth in one of the gambling palaces and the flashing brilliance of the famous Avenue of Luck was unabated. Magic Street still, alive with swarms of human moths fluttering from one source of light to another. The lights themselves blazed day and night, but the crowds would gradually fade away as the darkness of the upper skies waned.

It was time for her also to go home. But she lingered in an unnatural indecision, knowing she could do nothing, wondering what she could do. The inner conflict drained her strength and twice within an hour she paused for energy drinks.

There was something else too, a sense of personal disaster. She had always taken it for granted that she would eventually marry a weapon shop man. All through school and college, when her own application for membership was already approved, she had thought of all others—the ordinary people as outsiders.

She thought with a piercing comprehension, "It was that moment on the ship when

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he was in trouble. I felt sorry for him."

He was in deeper trouble now. If she could possibly locate *his* house she would—

Her mind paused. She felt astounded at the forcefulness of the idea that came. Why, it was ridiculous. If she went to one of those places she would have to go through with an illusion, mentally *and* physically.

It seemed to her, shakily, that the weapon shops would throw her out for even considering such a thing. But when her mind automatically dashed back over the fine print of the documents she had signed she couldn't recall any prohibition. In fact some of the sentences, as she remembered them, seemed positively sensational when examined in her present situation:

". . . Weapon Shop people may marry according to their desire . . . participate, in or partake of any vice or pleasure of Isher for personal reasons . . . There are absolutely no restrictions on the use made of a member's spare time by the member . . .

"It is, of course, taken for granted that no member will wish to do anything that might harm his or her standing with the Pp machine . . . as everyone has been clearly told . . . periodic examinations by the Pp will determine the status of a member's continuance with the shops . . .

"In the event that a member is discovered to have fallen below the requirements in any vital degree, the weapon shops will relieve the individual of all weapon shop memories and information, the possession of which by unauthorized persons might be dangerous to the shops . . .

"The following vices and pleasures, when pursued with too much ardor, have proven in the past to be initial steps in the severance of relations . . ."

Among those she remembered as being mildly dangerous for women was—"Houses of illusion." She couldn't recall clearly but it seemed to her there had been a footnote in connection with that listing. Something about the danger not being in the pleasure itself but in the knowledge that the men in such places were nearly always unwilling slaves. Repeated experiences caused penetrations of the ego, with the result that what began as a search for a comparatively normal sensual adventure ended with the ever bolder participation of the ego.

SHE came out of her intent memory reverie to realize that she was walking rapidly toward the special flash signal of a 'stat station.

Within a minute she had her connection with the weapon shop Information Center. A few seconds later, a 'stat duplicate of the 2108 addresses of houses of Illusion in her purse, she was heading for the Penny Palace.

Her decision was made and from that moment she had not a thought of drawing back.

Inside the Penny Palace she saw things that Cayle could not possibly have observed without having the knowledge that she had. The play, she saw, was back to normal—almost. A few of the hired people were still ostentatiously playing at games that would otherwise have been unnaturally bare of players.

The moment enough legitimate members were risking money on a machine the hirelings withdrew casually. Lucy headed toward the rear of the great room, pausing frequently and pretending to watch the play at various games. She carried a weapon shop nullifier in her purse. So she opened and shut the doors leading to the manager's office without setting off the Imperial-type alarms.

Inside she depended entirely on her ring alarm to warn her of anybody's approach. Cooly but swiftly she searched the office. First she pressed the machine-file activator, pecking out the key word *illusion*. The file screen remained blank. She clicked off the word *house*. No response.

Surely he had the address of the house or houses with which he dealt. In a fury she snatched up the 'stat book and operated its activators. But there, too, *house* and *illusion* produced no response. Was it possible this man Martin—she had found his name on various documents—had connections with only a few houses and had their numbers in his head? Grimly she realized it was very possible indeed.

She had no intention of withdrawing from all the possibilities of her position. She made a quick examination of the contents of the desk. Finding nothing she settled into the comfortable chair and waited. Not for long—her finger tingled as the ring-alarm went off. She turned it, first towards one of the two doors, then the other.

The active response came from the same door through which she had entered nearly fifteen minutes earlier. Whoever it was would now be in the corridor, his hand reaching for the office door.

The door opened, and the roly-poly man

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came in. He was humming softly to himself. The big desk and the chair in which she was sitting were so placed that he was inside before he saw that he had a visitor.

He blinked at her with his sea-blue eyes, a little fatty of a man who had somehow, long ago, conquered all fear. The piglike eyes switched to the gun in her fingers, then back to her face, greedily.

"Pretty girl," he said at last.

It was obviously not a complete reaction. Lucy waited. And finally it came, a purring question with an overtone of snarl.

"What do you want?"

"My husband."

From all angles that seemed to Lucy the best identification to make of herself. It was natural that there might be a Mrs. Cayle Clark in the background. That was she.

"Husband?" echoed the man blankly. He looked genuinely puzzled.

Lucy said in a monotone. "He was winning. I waited in the background, keeping an eye on him. Then I was forced out by a pushing crowd. When I tried to get back the doors were locked. When they opened he wasn't there. I went home but he wasn't there. I put two and two together and here I am."

It was a long speech but it covered the subject. It gave a picture of a worried, determined wife. And that was very important. It would be unwise if he suspected that the weapon shops were interested in Cayle Clark. She saw that understanding had come to the other.

"Oh, you mean him." He laughed curtly, his eyes watchful. "Sorry, young lady, I merely called a truckplane service that has contacts. What they do with the people I don't know."

Lucy said precisely, "What you mean is you don't know the address to which they took him but you know the kind of place. Isn't that correct?"

HE STARED at her thoughtfully, as if trying to make up his mind about something. Finally, he shrugged.

"House of illusion," he said.

The fact that she had guessed that did not make the confirmation less valuable. Just as his apparent frankness did not mean that he was telling the truth.

Lucy siad, "I notice there's a Lambeth in the corner over there. Bring it here."

He brought it instantly. "You'll notice," he said, "I'm not resisting."

Lucy made no reply. She picked up the Lambeth cone and pointed it at the fat man.

"What is your name?"

"Harj Martin."

The Lambeth needles remained stationery. Martin it was.

The man said before she could speak, "I'm prepared to give you all the information you want." He shrugged. "Doesn't mean a thing to me. We're protected. If you can locate the house your husband was taken to, go ahead. But you should know the houses have their own methods of getting rid of men when the police are called in."

There was a nervousness in his manner that interested Lucy. She looked at him with bright eyes.

"You must be making plans," she said. "You would like to reverse our positions." She shook her head deprecatingly. "Don't try it. I would shoot."

"It's a weapon shop gun," Martin said, pointedly.

"Exactly," said Lucy. "It won't shoot unless you attack me."

That wasn't strictly true. Weapon shop members had special guns, that would shoot under fewer restrictions than the guns sold to consumers.

Martin sighed. "Very well," he said. "The name of the firm is Lowery Truckplanes."

Anton Lowery was a blond giant, who lifted himself sleepily from his pillow and stared stupidly at Lucy. He made no attempt to get up.

He said finally, "I don't know where they would have taken him. It's just transportation business with us, you understand. The driver calls up houses at random, until he finds one that can use a man. We don't keep records."

He sounded vaguely indignant. Like an honest trucker whose business ethics were being questioned for the first time. Lucy wasted no time arguing the matter.

"Where can I locate the driver?" she asked.

It seemed the driver had gone off duty at 2 A.M. and was not due back for another 66 hours. "It's these unions," said Mr. Lowery. "Short hours, big pay and plenty of time off." Giving the information seemed to bring him a satisfaction, a sense of victory over her, that detracted considerably from the indignation in his tone.

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"Where does he live?" Lucy asked.

He hadn't the faintest idea. "Might get that from the union," he suggested. "They don't give us addresses."

It turned out that he couldn't remember the name of the union. The Lambeth, which she had brought along from the Penny Palace, verified his statements one by one. Lucy sagged. Three days! In three days Cayle would be initiated into the illusions behind the houses of illusion. The dark thought roused her to abrupt anger.

"Damn you!" she said savagely. "When the driver reports back to work, you get the address of the house from him. I'll call you ten minutes after he's due back to work and you'd better have the information."

Her tone and manner must have been convincing. For Anton Lowery assured her hastily that he had no objection to her gaining the information and would personally see to it that she got it. He was still protesting as she left his bedroom.

Outside Lucy had another energy drink at a corner automat—and realized it wasn't enough. Her watch showed a few minutes to 5 A.M. And her tense body told her that it was time to go home to bed.

She reached her apartment without incident. Wearily, she undressed, and heavily climbed between the sheets. Her last conscious thought was—

"Three days—would the time pass more slowly for the man who was enduring continuous pleasure? Or for herself who knew that pleasure prolonged was the greatest pain of all?"

She slept on that thought like an overtired child.

CHAPTER XI

Short Circuit

AS SOON as she had the address of the house she called up Hedrock. He listened thoughtfully to her account, then nodded.

"Good work," he said. "We'll back you up. I'll send a warship over, very high up. And if we don't hear from you in a reasonable time we'll raid."

He hesitated. "I hope you realize that the only way we can justify such action is if you leave no doubt in Clark's mind that your reasons are purely personal. Are you prepared to go that far?"

He didn't need the question. The haggard face that stared at him from the 'stat screen left no question of the extent of her fixation. This girl was in a bad way. He had a qualm of pity. But actually he was not responsible for her feelings.

He had merely recognized them, and used his knowledge of psychology to intensify her pursuit. A callidetic of the measurement of Cayle Clark would yet make himself felt in Isher. The chance that the impact would affect the war itself was not impossible.

Once started on the right path, the pace of activity, the pattern of callidity, would be a direct moving cube, piling up so fast that no human brain would grasp the extent of what was happening until afterwards.

If only there were some way of discovering what form it would take—Hedrock shook himself inwardly. He was not given to wishful thinking. They would simply have to watch his movements and hope that they would recognize *the* moment when it arrived.

He saw that the girl was waiting for him to speak again. His thoughts grew instantly sharp. He said, "What time is your appointment? Tonight or tomorrow?"

"Tonight at ten-thirty." She managed a grim smile. "The receptionist insisted I be on time. Apparently, they can scarcely handle the business they get."

"Suppose he isn't among those available at that time—what will you say?"

"I gather that there is a complete illusion break at that time. The men and women are then allowed to select partners. However, if he shouldn't be available I shall not be either. I shall be very finicky."

"Do you think Clark will recognize you?" He saw that she didn't understand what he meant. He explained. "The illusions leave after-image hallucinations which interfere with visual perception."

Lucy said, "I'll make him recognize me."

She described several methods she would use. Hedrock considered them, then shook his head.

"It's obvious," he said, "that you've never been in a house. These people are perpetually, endlessly, suspicious. Until you are actually in a state of illusion your chances of saying anything that is not overheard are dim. Once the automatic machines begin

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radiating stimuli they don't worry about you any more. Bear that in mind and adjust yourself to any situation that may come up."

Lucy was recovered from her shock. After the afternoon she and Cayle had spent together she had felt sure of him.

"He'll recognize me," she said firmly.

HEDROCK said nothing to that. He had merely wanted to point out the problem. Three days and nights of illusions was a long time. Even if there were no afterimages the brain was dulled, the body's capacity for life temporarily at low ebb, no energy for memory.

Lucy was speaking again. "I'd better get ready. Goodbye, Mr. Hedrock."

"All the luck in the world, Lucy," said Hedrock. "But don't call for help unless it's absolutely necessary."

Hedrock did not leave the 'stat the moment the connection was broken. During this period of emergency he lived in an apartment adjoining the coordination office. His work was his life. Virtually all his waking hours were spent at his desk. Now he called the weapon shop naval headquarters and ordered them to dispatch a protective warship.

And still he was not satisfied. Frowning, he considered the potentialities of Lucy's position and finally called for her secret file. In two minutes, by weapon shop interspatial transportation, the remote Information Center precipitated the plate onto the table in front of him. First, he checked the facts—comprehension 110, horizon 118, plethora 105, dominance 151, ego 120, emotion index 150—

Hedrock paused there. Compared to the norm of 100, not forgettting the average of 85, Lucy was a fine, intelligent girl with a somewhat high-category emotional capacity. It was that that had brought her into the affair. After Cayle Clark was identified (by a routine check-up on the crowds that gathered before a new weapon shop) as a callidetic giant it was decided to contact him through the medium of an unmarried girl with a high emotion index.

Deliberately the weapon makers' Council anticipated that the callidetic would excite fixation in Lucy. There were other factors involved in her selection, mostly sanity safeguards for a young woman who was going to be subjected to unnatural stresses. For one thing it was desirable, from the point of view of the girl's happiness, that the attraction be mutual for the time being. Permanency, of course, could not be guaranteed in a changing world.

One by one Hedrock examined the factors applicable to the present situation. At last he sighed. He felt sorry for Lucy. The weapon shops did not normally interfere with the private lives of their members or of anyone. Only the unparalleled emergency justified using an individual human being as a pawn.

Thought of the emergency drew his mind. He returned the file to Information Center, then switched on the 'stat again. He manipulated it intently, rejected several images that resulted from the "draw" of energy in the room he was aiming at and finally had what he wanted—the map of time.

He had no difficulty locating the large shadow. It was lying six weeks and a day in the future. The tiny shadow was harder to find. He saw it finally, a minute black point on the curving vastness of the map. It seemed to be approximately a million million years in the past.

Hedrock closed his eyes, and strove to visualize the span of time. He couldn't. The energy locked up in McAllister was too great now for planetary comparisons, the problem of exploding it a logic nightmare.

When at last he shut off the 'stat he experienced a cosmic weariness, and a stunned incredulous wonder that, after all this time, he still didn't have a single solution to the deadliest danger that had ever confronted the entire Solar System.

He spent the next hour studying precis of reports that had been filed by other agents throughout the day. Lucy didn't know that she was among the few dozen agents who obtained immediate and direct access to him at any time of the day or night. Those not so favored talked to machines or to any one of a dozen executives who alternated on a three-shift basis.

AGAIN and again the condensed accounts required more thorough investigation. Not once did he begrudge the time. Not once did he let himself feel rushed. Each report was examined in the detail that he considered necessary.

Ten-thirty came and, though he was aware that Lucy must now have arrived at the house, he paused only briefly and called the weapon shop warship, which was hover-

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ing high above the place. For a moment he examined the house itself as it showed through a telescope, a toylike structure in a suburban estate that seemed all garden. Then, the picture of it clear in his mind, he returned to his work.

At five minutes after eleven there was a call. The 'stat buzzed, and Lucy's face came on the screen. She looked blank.

"I don't know what happened," she said. "Everything went absolutely okay. He recognized me without giving the show away. We were led away to one of the apartments. The illusion machines went on. I was just about to nullify their effect when everything went black. The next thing I knew I was here in my apartment."

"Just a moment," Hedrock said.

He broke the connection and called the warship. The commander shrugged.

"I was sitting down to call you. There was a police raid and the warning must have been awfully short, because they loaded dozens of women into single carplanes and carted them off to their homes."

"What about the men?" Hedrock was tense. In emergencies the houses sometimes had nasty habits.

"That's why I didn't call you immediately. I saw them pile the men into a truckplane and shoot them off. I followed but they used the usual method."

"I see," said Hedrock. He covered his eyes with one shielding hand, and groaned inwardly. The problem of Cayle Clark was becoming complex again, and there was nothing to do but let him go. "Okay, captain," he said gloomily, "good work."

He clicked off, called Lucy again and gave her the news. "I'm sorry," he said, "but that eliminates him from the picture. We don't dare interfere."

"What'll I do?" she asked.

"Just wait," he said. "Wait."

That was all there was to say.

CHAPTER XII

Mars

MOST of the houses were known to the police. But there was an unwritten law in connection with them. When a raid was due to take place the owner was warned. But the names of the men who had been imprisoned on the premises *must* be discoverable in some easily accessible desk drawer. During the next few days a check-up would be made of passenger lists recording the names of indigents and criminals being sent to Mars, Venus and the various moons.

Government contractors were insatiably in need of men for work on other planets. And the houses, frequented as they were by wealthy women who could not afford scandals, supplied a constant trickle of labor with no questions asked.

In their dealings with the houses the police objected only to the idea that dead men told no tales. Proprietors found themselves mercilessly haled to court when they broke that one unalterable rule. After thousands of years, it had proved an effective method for keeping vice operating within the important limit, that the victim survived his grim experience.

* * * * *

Cayle stepped off the gangplank onto the soil of Mars. And stopped. It was an unconscious reaction. The ground was as hard as rock. The chill of it penetrated the soles of his shoes and somehow pierced the marrow of his being.

With ice-cold eyes he surveyed the bleak town of Shardl. And this time a thought came, a hatred so violent that he shuddered, a determination so strong that he could feel the ice in him turning into steel.

"Get a move on, you—" A stick prodded his shoulders. One of the soldiers directing the disembarkment of the long line of sullen men bawled the words, his voice sounding strangely hollow in that rarefied air.

Cayle did not even turn around. He moved—that was his reaction to the insult and indignity. He walked along, keeping his place in the line, and with every step he took the chill of the ground clamped more tightly on his feet.

He could feel the coldness of the air now in his lungs. Ahead of him other men felt the constriction. They began to run. Still others broke past him, breathing hoarsely, the whites of their eyes showing, their bodies clumsily responding to the lesser gravity. The ground was rough and uneven and those who fell cried out as the jagged edges tore at them. Human blood stained

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the iron-hard soil of ever-frozen Mars.

Cayle walked on, unheeding, contemptuous of those who had lost their heads. They had been warned against the gravity. And the great enclosed plastic compound was only a quarter of a mile away, the intervening cold shocking but bearable.

He reached the compound, his flesh tingling, his feet numbed. It was warm inside and he made his way slowly to the side of the building from which the main section of the town was visible.

Shardl was a mining town. It stood on a flat plain that was just beginning to blossom here and there with the green of warm atomic gardens. The shrubbery, spotty and incongruous, only emphasized the near desolation of every visible horizon.

He saw that men were studying bulletin boards over against one wall. He moved closer, and read what he could see of one sign. It read:

OPPORTUNITY

Cayle pressed up to it, then smiled, and turned away. So they wanted people to sign up for Martian farms. Agree to remain fifteen years and *Her Gracious Majesty, Inelda of Isher, will supply you—yes,* YOU—*with a completely equipped atomic-heated farm. No down payment, forty years to pay.*"

The offer concluded insinuatingly, "Go immediately to the Lands office, sign your application—and you will not have to do one minute's work in the mines."

CAYLE was immune. He had heard of this system of colonizing the cold planet of Mars and the hot planet of Venus. Eventually every acre of soil would be occupied, and the planet subjected to the beneficent influence of atomic power.

And so, over the millennia, men would at last thaw all the icy habitable worlds of the Solar System and chill the burning deserts of Venus and Mercury. Men working out their lives on the drabber spawnings of their sun would create reasonable facsimiles of the far green Earth from which they had come.

That was the theory. In all those lazy days at public school, when he had read and listened to the accounts of the colonization, he had not dreamed that he would one day be standing here, looking out at the half-light world of Mars, *standing here* caught by a process too ruthless for any man, raised as he had been raised, to resist.

He had no hatred now of his father. That was gone out of him into the hazy mists of the past, into that world of nothingness where his illusions had gone. The poor dumb fool—that was his thought now. Perhaps, it was just as well that some people never did comprehend the realities of life in the empire of Isher.

His own personal problem was solved in a simple, effective fashion. He had been afraid. Now he wasn't. He had, astonishingly enough, been honest. Now, he wasn't. Well, in a way he wasn't. It all depended on an individual's outlook on life as to how far he'd accept the theory that a human being must be strong enough to face the necessities of his era.

Cayle Clark intended to face them all the way. Not for long would such a man as he had become remain on Mars. Meanwhile, sign nothing that would restrict his movements. Be cautious but seize opportunities instantly on an all-out basis.

Behind him a voice said slyly, "Am I addressing Cayle Clark, formerly of the village of Glay?"

Cayle turned slowly. He hadn't expected opportunity to come so quickly.

The man who stood before him was small. He wore an overcoat of a fancy expensive design and he was very obviously not a person who had come on the boat. It was a healthy looking coat but the man inside looked shriveled and insignificant. He spoke again:

"I am the local—uh—representative of the Fifth Bank. It may be that we can help you out of this unusual situation."

He looked like a toad, his gaunt face enframed in a high collar. His eyes, like black seeds, peered forth with a dull but avaricious light.

Cayle shrank involuntarily, not from fear but from loathing. There had been a woman who came to the house, a woman bedecked with jewels and furs—with a face like that and eyes like that. And all the whips they had used on his bare back while she looked on with greedy eyes had not broken his will to have nothing to do with her. It cost Cayle an effort of mind to realize that he must not necessarily compare the two people or that they had anything in common.

"Interested?" asked the creature.

Cayle started to nod. And then a word that

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hadn't really penetrated before came through to his consciousness.

"What bank did you say?"

The human caricature smiled with the look of a man who realized he was bearing precious gifts.

"The Fifth bank," he said. "You made a deposit in our central at Imperial City about a month ago. In the course of a normal investigation of the background of any new depositor we discovered that you were on your way to Mars under unpleasant circumstances. We therefore wish to place our loan department at your service."

"I see," said Cayle carefully.

HIS eyes, sharp and alert, made another more detailed examination of this agent of the great bank. It found nothing new, nothing to inspire confidence. And yet he did not think of ending the conversation.

"Just what would the bank do for me?" he asked quietly.

The man cleared his throat. "You are the son of Fara and Creel Clark?" he asked pompously.

Cayle admitted the relationship after a moment's hesitation.

"You desire to return to Earth?"

There was no hesitation about that. The answer was yes.

"The base fare," said the creature, "is six hundred credits for the trip when the distance between Mars and Earth permits a twenty-four day journey. When the distance is greater the cost is ten credits a day extra. You probably knew that."

Cayle hadn't known. But he had guessed that the mine head wage of 25 credits a week would not provide a quick means of returning to Earth. He felt tensed, conscious of how completely a man without resources could be confined to a planet. He had an idea of what was coming.

"The Fifth bank," said the man in a grand tone, "will loan you the sum of one thousand credits if your father will guarantee the debt and if you will sign a note agreeing to pay back ten thousand credits."

Cayle sat down heavily. The end of hope had come more swiftly than he expected.

"My father," he said wearily, "would never guarantee a note for ten thousand credits."

"Your father," said the agent, "will only be asked to guarantee the one thousand. You will be expected to pay ten thousand out of your future earnings."

Cayle studied him with narrowed eyes. "By what method will this money be paid over to me?"

The gaunt face smiled. "You sign, then we give it to you. And just leave your father to us. The bank has a psychology department for handling co-signers and signers of notes. On some we use the dominating technique—on others—"

Cayle interrupted. "So far as I'm concerned the money has to be paid before I sign."

The other shrugged, and laughed. "As you will. I see you're a sharp fellow. Come over to the mine manager's office."

He walked off, Cayle following thoughtfully. It was too easy and he didn't like it. Everything was happening too swiftly, as if—well, as if this were part of the routine of the end of a voyage. He slowed and looked around alertly. There was a long line of offices, he saw, where other men were being taken by well dressed individuals.

It seemed to him that he could visualize the picture then. The first offer on the bulletin board. Volunteer to go on a farm. If they didn't get you that way, then along came a smooth individual to offer a loan on the basis of your family credit. The loan money would either not be advanced at all or it would be stolen from you without mercy immediately afterwards.

Thereupon, having exhausted all your available resources, present and future, you were on Mars to stay.

"There'll be a couple of witnesses," Clark thought. "Big fellows with guns on them to make sure that you don't get your money."

IT WAS a good way to colonize an unfriendly planet, possibly the only way, considering that human beings were not too interested any more in pioneering.

He walked into the room. And there were the two men, well-dressed, smiling, friendly. They were introduced as, respectively, the mine manager and a clerk from the bank.

Clark wondered cynically how many other individuals, shanghaied as he had been, were being introduced at this moment to the "mine manager." It sounded very impressive and it must be thrilling to have a chance to talk in a heart-to-heart fashion with so important a man, to realize that he was human after all.

Clark shook hands with him and then turned to look the situation over. The important thing was to get the money legally.

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That meant actually signing the document and getting a copy. Even that might not mean anything but, after all, there was a certain amount of law on the planets. The dangerous thing was to be without money and to arrive in court where other men could blandly deny one's story.

The room was not large but it was luxuriously furnished. It *could* have been a mine manager's office. There were two doors, the one through which he had come, and one directly opposite it, where presumably the robbed individual made his exit without getting any chance to talk to people in the big room from which he had come.

Clark walked over to the second floor, opened it and saw that it led outside. There were scores of huts within sight and, standing in groups all around, were soldiers. The sight of them gave him pause, for obviously they would make it impossible for him to make a run for it if he succeeded in obtaining the money.

He used his body to block off the knob. With swift fingers he tested it to see if it were locked from the outside. It was. Quietly, he closed the door and, with a smile, turned back into the room.

He shivered convincingly. "Sure chilly out there. I'll be glad to get back to Earth."

The three men smiled sympathetically and the reptilian bank agent held out a document with ten one-hundred credit bills clipped to it. Clark counted the money and put it into his pocket. Then he read the contract. It was quite simple, apparently designed to ease the minds of people who were suspicious of involved forms.

There were three copies, one to be sent to Earth, one for the Martian branch and one for him. They were properly signed and sealed and awaited only his signature. Clark tore off the bottom one and put it into his pocket. The others were inserted into the registered circuit. He signed the first one with a flourish—which made the transaction legal—and then he stepped back, and threw the pen, point first, into the face of the "manager."

The man screamed, and put his hand up to his torn cheek.

That was all Clark saw. With a jump he reached the side of the toadlike man, grabbed at his neck just above the heavy coat collar and squeezed with all his strength. The creature yelped and struggled weakly.

For a moment then Clark had the sharp fear that his plan of attack had been falsely based. He had absolutely assumed that the other had a gun also and would reach for it in panic.

Long skinny fingers were clawing inside the voluminous coat. They came out clutching a little glittering blaster that Clark snatched, hand and all, and crushed into his own palm. Simultaneously he squeezed the weapon away from the other's grasp.

He saw that the big "clerk" had his gun out, and was edging around, trying to get a chance to use it without harming the reptile. Clark took a snap shot at the man's foot. The radiant flame made a thin, bright beam. There were an odor of burning leather and a streamer of blue smoke. With a cry the fellow dropped his weapon, and sat down heavily on the floor. He writhed there, clutching his foot.

At Clark's urging, the "manager" held up his hands reluctantly. Swiftly, Clarke relieved him of his blaster, picked up the one on the floor and backed toward the door.

He explained his plan briefly. The toad would accompany him as a hostage. They

[*Turn page*]

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would go to the nearest airline base and fly to the city of Mare Cimmerium, at which point he would catch a regular liner for Earth.

"And if anything should go wrong," Cayle Clark concluded, "at least one person will die before I do."

Nothing went wrong.

And that day was August 26th, 4784 Isher, two months and twenty-three days after Imperial Innelda launched her attack on the weapon makers.

CHAPTER XIII

Face to Face

CAYLE CLARK planned and schemed. The days of the journey from Mars to Earth wound their clockwise course. The ship time switched gradually from Cimmerium Daylight Time to Imperial City Time. But the night outside, with its flashingly bright sun off to one side and everywhere else starry darkness, was an unchanging environment.

Meals were eaten. Clark slept and dreamed and moved and had his being. His thoughts grew more direct, more determined. He had no doubts. A man who had put away fear of death could not fail. It was as simple as that.

The sun grew brighter. It splashed spiral-like across the darkness. Mars receded to a point of smallness, a reddish dot in a sea of night—hard to find among the starry brilliants of the jewel-case sky. Gradually Earth became a large, shining ball of light, then a monstrous, misty, unbelievable thing that filled half the sky.

The continents showed through. And on Earth's nightside, partly visible as the ship swung past the moon, the cities shone with intermittent glitter that rivaled the heavens themselves.

Clark saw that vision of Earth in snatches only. Five days from destination he had discovered a stud poker game in one of the holds. From the beginning he lost. Not every game—an occasional win helped him recuperate a few credits. But by the third day of the endless game, the second last of the trip, the direction of his fortune was so marked that he took alarm and quit.

In his cabin he counted the money that remained to him—eighty-one credits. He had paid eight percent commission on the thousand credits to the representative of the bank. The rest had gone on fare, poker losses and one Imperial-style gun.

"At least," Clark thought, "I'll soon be back in Imperial City. And with more money than when I arrived last time."

He lay back, amazingly at ease. The poker losses did not disturb him. He hadn't, when he came right down to it, planned to try gambling again. He had a different picture of his life. He would take risks, of course, but on a higher level.

He had won five hundred thousand credits—at least—in the Penny Palace. It would be difficlt to collect it but he would succeed. He felt himself patient and capable, ready for all eventualities.

As soon as he had the money he would secure a commission from Colonel Medlon. He might pay for it and he might not. It depended upon the moment.

There was no vengefulness in his plan. He didn't care what happened to two venal creatures like Fatty and the colonel. They were stepping stones, it seemed to Clark, in the most ambitious scheme that had ever been planned in the Empire of Isher. A scheme rooted in a fact that seemed to have escaped all the creature-men who had risen to positions of rank in the Imperial service.

INNELDA of Isher meant well by the country. In his one contact with her he had sensed a personality frustrated by the corruption of others. In spite of the talk against her the Empress was honest—on a Machiavellian level, of course.

Clarke did not doubt that she could issue an order of execution. But that was part of her function as ruler. Like himself she must rise to the necessities of her situation.

The Empress was honest. She would welcome a man who would use her limitless authority to clean house for her. For two and a half months now he had been thinking over what she had said that day in Medlon's office and he had some pretty shrewd answers.

There was her reference to officer-prospects staying away in droves because they had heard that something was up. And her accusation of a pro-weapon shop conspiracy tied in with the inexplicable closing of the shops. Something *was* up and, for a man who had made a personal contact, it spelled

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massive opportunity.

To all his planned actions Clark made but one qualification. First he must seek out Lucy Rall and ask her to marry him.

That hunger could not wait.

The ship came down into its cradle a few minutes before noon on a cloudless day. There were formalities and it was two o'clock before Clark's papers were stamped and he emerged into the open. A breeze touched his cheeks and, from the peak of metal that was the landing field, he could see the dazzling city to the west.

It was a view to make a man catch his breath. But Clark did not waste any time. From a 'stat booth, he called Lucy's number. A pause, then a young man's face came onto the screen.

"I'm Lucy's husband," he said. "She went out for a minute but you don't want to talk to her." Persuasively. "Take a good look at me and you'll agree."

Clark stared blankly. But the familiarity of the other's face would not penetrate through the shock of the words he had spoken.

"Look hard," the image in the 'stat urged.

"I don't think," Clark began, "that—"

And then he got it. *Then* he got it. He drew back like a man who had been pushed. He put out his hand as if he would defend his eyes from a vision that was too bright for them. He could feel the blood draining from his cheeks, and he swayed. The now familiar voice drew him back to normalcy.

"Pull yourself together!" it said. "And listen. I want you to meet me tomorrow night on the beach of the Haberdashery Paradise. Take one more look at me, convince yourself and be there."

Clark didn't need the look but his eyes sought the image-face. And there was no question. The face that was staring at him from the 'stat was his own.

Cayle Clark was looking at Cayle Clark—at 2:10 P.M., October 4, 4784 Isher.

CHAPTER XIV

The Empress Orders

OCTOBER 6th—the Empress stirred, and turned over in bed. She had a memory. The night before she had told herself that by morning her mind would be made up. As she came out of sleep she realized the uncertainty was still there. She opened her eyes, already embittered against the day.

She sat up, composing the tension in her face. And as she did so half a dozen maids, who had been hovering behind a sound-proofed screen, dashed forward. An energy drink was tendered. Sunlight adjustments were made, the great bedroom brightened for another morning.

Massage, shower, facial, hair—and, again and again, as the routine proceeded, she thought, "I have got to get action or the attack will end in a personal humiliation. Surely, after four months, they cannot keep on delaying."

As soon as she had her dress on she began to receive palace officials. First, Gerritt, the Chief of Palace Administration. He had a problem, many of them, and as usual, annoying ones. That was her own fault, partially.

Long ago, she had insisted that all punishments of the help be referred to her. Today the predominant motif was insolence. Servants defying their superiors and shirking their work. The offense was becoming common.

"For heaven's sake," Innelda said irritably, "if they don't like the limitations of the position, why don't they quit? Palace trained servants can always obtain positions, if only for what they are believed to know about my private life."

"Why does not your majesty let me handle these personal matters?" said Gerritt. It was his stock remark, stolidly made. She knew that eventually he would wear her down but not to his own benefit. No stubborn old conservative was going to have full control of the palace help. A heritage from the regency period, he and all his kind were going to be emptied out of the palace one of these days.

She sighed, dismissed him—and was back with her problem. What to do? Should she order attacks wherever possible? Or wait in the hope that new information would turn up? The trouble was that she had been waiting now for so many weeks.

General Doocar came in, a tall, thin man with slate-gray eyes. He saluted with an angular motion and said, "The building reappeared for two hours forty minutes last night, only one minute from the estimated time."

Innelda nodded. That was routine now. The pattern of reappearance had been es-

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tablished within a week of the first disappearance. She still insisted on being kept informed of the building's movements, just why she couldn't decide.

"I'm like a child," she thought self-critically. "I can't let anything get out of my control."

The analysis darkened her mood. She made a few sharp remarks about the efficiency of the military scientists under his command, then asked the question. The general shook his head.

"Madam," he said, "an attack is out of the question at the moment. We have a power machine dominating the weapon shops in every large city on this planet—but during the past two and a half months eleven thousand officers have deserted. The power machines are manned by guards who do not know how to operate them."

The woman flashed, "The hypnotic machine could teach them en masse in one hour."

"Yes." The hard voice did not change. The thin lips became a little thinner. That was all. "Your Majesty, if you are prepared to hand such information over to common soldiers that is your privilege. You have but to command and I will obey."

Innelda bit her lip, vexed. This grim old man had her there.

It was annoying to have come out at last with a thought that she had restrained so often in the past.

She said defensively, "It seems that the so-called common soldiers are more loyal than my commissioned officers and braver."

He shrugged. "You allow these tax creatures of yours the privilege of selling commissions," he said. "You do, generally, get educated people that way, but you surely don't expect a man who has paid ten thousand credits for a captaincy to take the chance of getting himself killed."

THE argument began to weary her. She had heard it all before in different words. The same old meanings, dressed up in recuperated emotions, though it was some weeks now since the problem of commissions in the armed forces had been mentioned. The subject was not a pleasant one.

It reminded her now of something she had almost forgotten.

"The last time we talked of this," she said slowly, "I requested you to contact Colonel Medlon and ask him whatever became of that officer he was about to commission when I called him one day? It isn't often that I make personal contacts with lower ranks."

Savagely—"I'm hedged in here by a brigade of old men who don't know how to mobilize an army." She fought down her anger. "But never mind that. What about him?"

GENERAL DOOCAR said stonily, "Colonel Medlon informs me that the young officer-prospect did not return at the appointed hour. The colonel assumes that he must have got wind of what was up and hastily changed his mind."

There was silence. She found herself thinking—that sounded wrong. He wasn't like that.

And besides, the Empress personally had talked to him.

She did not underestimate the power of such direct contact. People who met the Empress of Isher felt not only her personal charm but experienced the abnormal aura of her position. The combination was absolutely overpowering, not to be lightly dismissed on the word of a suspected wino. She spoke at last with a quiet determination:

"General, inform the colonel *today* that he will either produce this young officer, or face a Lambeth in the morning."

The gaunt man bowed but there was a cynical smile on his face. "Madam," he said, "if it gives you pleasure to destroy corruption, one individual at a time, you have a lifelong task ahead of you."

She didn't like that. There was a brutality in the remark that reached deep into her. She drew back.

Then, "I've got to start somewhere." She made a gesture, half-threat, half frustration. She said querulously, "I don't understand you any more, General. When I was younger you used to agree that something ought to be done."

"Not by you." He shook his head. "The Imperial family must sanction, not personally direct, a moral house-cleaning." He shrugged. "As a matter of fact, I have more or less come around to the weapon shop idea that this is an age where people take to corruption whenever their adventurous instincts are denied normal expression."

The green, imperial eyes flashed.

"I am not interested in weapon shop philosophy."

She was abruptly astounded that he should

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have mentioned the weapon shops in such fashion.

She flung the accusation at him. The grand old man was immune.

"Madam," he said, "when I stop examining the ideas and philosophies of a power that has now existed for three thousand seven hundred years you may have my head examined."

The woman rejected the argument. Everywhere she turned was this semi-worship of the weapon shops. More, it was an acceptance of the shops as a legitimate facet of Isher civilization.

"I must get rid of these old men," she thought, not for the first time. "They knew me as a child and will always treat me as if I am."

Aloud, she said icily, "General, I am not interested in hearing the moral teachings of an organization that at base is responsible for all the immorality in the Solar System.

"We live in an age where productive capacity is so great that no good need ever starve. Crime because of economic need does not exist. The problem of psychiatric crime can be solved whenever we get hold of the afflicted person. But what is the situation?"

She was hot now with remembered rage. "We discover that our psychopath has been sold a weapon shop gun. The owner of a house of illusion is similarly protected. True, in that case, there is an understanding between the police and the houses whereby raids are allowed. But if any individual owner should decide to resist, we would have to bring a thirty-thousand-cycle cannon to defeat him."

SHE paused to survey the job done by her hairdresser, felt satisfied, waved the woman away.

"Ridiculous and criminal!" she snapped. "On every side, we are frustrated in our desire to end this eternal wickedness of millions of individuals, who sneer at the law because they have weapon shop guns. It would be different, if these—gunmakers would limit the sale of their products to respectable people. But when any sort of scoundrel can buy one—"

"A defensive gun!" interjected the general softly. "Defensive only."

"Exactly," snarled Innelda. "A man can commit any crime, then defend himself against justice. Oh—" furiously— "why do I even talk to you? General, I'm telling you. We have the weapon that can destroy these weapon shops once and for all. You don't have to kill the members, but get the army organized to destroy the shops. Get it organized, I say, for an attack within." She looked at him. "How long, General?"

He pleaded, "Give me till the new year, Madam. I swear that the confusion which was caused by the desertions has temporarily ruined us."

She had forgotten the deserters for the moment. "You have captured some of these officers?"

He hesitated.

"Some, yes."

"I want one available for questioning this morning."

General Doocar bowed.

"As for the rest," said Innelda, "keep the military police after them. As soon as this mess is over, I'll set up special courts-martial and we'll teach these traitors the meaning of their oaths of allegiance."

"Suppose," said Doocar and his voice was soft again, "they have weapon shop guns?"

HER reaction to that was so violent that she grew calm in her anger.

"My friend," she said gravely, "when Army discipline can be set to nought by an underground organization, then even the generals must realize it is time to destroy the subversion."

She made a motion with the right arm, a gesture of decisiveness.

"This afternon, general, I shall visit the laboratories of Olympian Field. I want to see what progress has been made in finding out just what the weapon makers did to that building.

"Tomorrow morning, at least, Colonel Medlon must procure for me the young man he was supposed to have commissioned. If he cannot do it one corrupt head will roll. You may think I am being childish, concerning myself with one individual. But I must start somewhere. And that young man I know about. Him I can check on.

"But now," she said, "you weapon shop admirer, get out of here before I do something drastic."

"Madam," protested Doocar mildly, "I am loyal to the House of Isher."

"I am glad to hear it," said Innelda scathingly.

She brushed past him and went out into the hallway without looking back.

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CHAPTER XV

Deserter

AS SHE entered the salon, she heard the faint sighing relief of those already there. She smiled darkly. People who wanted to eat in the Imperial salon had to wait till she broke bread or sent word she wasn't coming. No compulsion existed for anyone to be present. But usually those who had access did not deny themselves the privilege.

Innelda said, "Good morning!" Then sat down at the head of her table. She sipped a glass of water, which was the signal for the waiters to come in. After she had given her order, she looked around the room. Everywhere were graying heads, men and women over fifty, relics of the regency.

A half dozen young men and two of her younger secretaries sat at her own table. But they were a remnant, the residue of the emigration of young people that had followed the departure of Prince del Curtin.

"And did everybody have a nice sleep last night?" Innelda broke the silence sweetly.

Everybody hastened to assure her that they had. She murmured, "How nice!" And settled into a moody silence. She wasn't sure just what she wanted of her companions. Lightness, perhaps. But how much? A year before, a newly introduced young man had asked her if she were still a virgin. And since she was the remark still annoyed her.

Crudeness was definitely out of order. She had an instinctive feeling that immorality on her part would reflect on the reputation of the Isher family. But then what? She pecked at a piece of toast.

What did she want? A positive approach—a belief in principles, with an ability to see the humorous side of life. Her own upbringing, severe and simple, had stressed the positive mind trainings. Very important, but seriousness could be overdone.

She stiffened with an old determination. "I've got to get rid of these humorless, do-nothing, let's-be-careful-and-not-rock-the-boat, think-twice-and-stop—" She paused, self-pityingly, and prayed to her private gods, "Give me one good joke a day to make me laugh and one man who can handle affairs of state and, in addition, know how to amuse me. If only Del were here."

She scowled in annoyance at the direction her thoughts were taking. Her cousin, Prince del Curtin, disapproved of the attack on the weapon shops. What a shock, when she had first discovered that. And what mortification when all the young men of his clique left the palace with him, refusing to participate in the adventure.

Having killed Banton Vickers for threatening to inform the weapon shops of her plans, a treasonous utterance that would have destroyed her prestige if she had let it pass, she could not overlook the opposition. Tight-lipped, she recalled their final conversation, the prince cold and formal, marvelously good looking in his anger, herself uncertain but determined.

"When you get over this madness, Innelda, you may call me back."

He must have known that it was an opportunity for her to say, "That will be never."

But she hadn't dared to say it. Like a wife she had been, she thought now bitterly, wronged but unwilling to say too much, for fear that her husband might take her at her word. Not that she could ever marry the prince after such an action on his part. Still it would be nice to have him back—later—after the weapon shops were destroyed.

She finished breakfast and glanced at her watch. Nine-thirty. She cringed, involuntarily. The long day was barely begun.

At half past ten, free of urgent correspondence, she had the officer-deserter brought in. He was a young man of thirty-three according to his file, country-born and holding the rank of major. He came in, a faint, cynical smile on his lips, but his eyes looked depressed. His name was Gile Sanders.

INNELDA studied him with a gloom of her own. According to his file he had three mistresses and had made a fortune out of a peculiar graft involving Army purchases. It was a fairly typical case-history. And the part that was difficult to understand was why he, who had so much, had given it all up. She asked the question earnestly.

"And please," she said, "do not insult me by suggesting that you were concerned with the moral issue of war. Tell me simply and plainly why you gave up all your possessions for dishonor and disgrace. In one act you disinherited yourself. The very least that can happen to you is that you will be sent to Mars or Venus permanently. Were you a fool or a coward or both?"

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He shrugged. "I suppose I was a fool." His feet fumbled nervously over the floor. His eyes did not evade her direct stare, but his answer left her dissatisfied.

After ten minutes she had got no real explanation out of him. It was possible that the profit and loss motivation had not influenced his decision. She tried a new approach.

"According to your file," she said, "you were notified to report to building eight hundred A and, because of your rank, it was explained to you that at last a method had been found to destroy the weapon shops.

"An hour later, after having burned your private papers, you left your office and took up residence in a seaside cottage which you had purchased secretly—you thought—five years ago.

"A week later, when it was clear that you did not intend to do your duty, you were arrested. You have been in close confinement ever since. Is that picture fairly correct?"

The man nodded but he said nothing. The Empress studied him, biting her lips.

"My friend," she said softly at last, "I have it in my power to make your punishment anything I desire. Anything. Death, banishment, commutation"—she hesitated—"reinstatement."

Major Sanders sighed wearily. "I know," he said. "That was the picture I suddenly saw."

"I don't understand." She was puzzled. "If you realized the potentialities of your act, then you were very foolish."

"The picture," he said in a monotone, as if he had not heard her interruption, "of a time when someone, not necessarily you, would have that power without qualification, without there being anywhere to turn, without hope of alleviation, without—hope."

She had her answer. "Well, of all the stupidity!" said Innelda explosively. She leaned back in her chair, momentarily overcome, drew a deep breath, then shook her head in irritation.

"Major," she said gently, "I feel sorry for you. Surely your knowledge of the history of my family must have told you that the danger of misuse of power does not exist. The world is too big. As an individual I can interfere in the affairs of such a tiny proportion of the human race that it is ridiculous.

"Every decree that I issue vanishes into a positive blur of conflicting interpretations as it recedes from me. That decree could be ultimately cruel or ultimately mild—it would make no difference in the final administration of it. Anything, when applied to eleven billion people, takes on a meaningless quality that is impossible to imagine unless you have studied, as I have, actual results."

SHE saw with astonishment that her words had not touched him. She drew back, offended. It was all so crystal clear and here was one more obstinate fool. She restrained her anger with an effort.

"Major," she said, "with the weapon shops out of the way we could introduce steadying laws that could not be flouted. There would be more uniform administration of justice because people would have to accept the judgments of the courts, their only recourse being appeals to the higher benches."

"Exactly," said Sanders.

That was all. His tone rejected her logic. She studied him with stony gaze, all the sympathy gone out of her. She said from between clenched teeth, "If you are such a believer in the weapon shops, why did you not protect yourself by going to them for a defensive gun?"

"I did."

She hesitated, then her lips curled. "What was the matter?" she asked. "Did your courage fail you when it came to the point of using it to defend yourself from arrest?"

Even as she spoke she knew she shouldn't have said that. It left her open to a retort which, she realized, might be devastating. Her fear was justified.

Sanders said, "No, Your Majesty. I did exactly what some of the other—uh—deserters did. I took off my uniform and went to a weapon shop, intending to buy a gun. But the door wouldn't open. It appears that I am one of the few officers who believe that the Isher family is the more important of the two facets of Isher civilization."

His eyes had been bright as he spoke. Now, they grew depressed again.

"I am," he said, "in exactly the position you want to put everybody into. I have no way to turn. I must accept your law, must accept secret declarations of war on an institution that is as much a part of Isher civilization as the House of Isher itself, must accept death if you decree it without a chance to defend myself in open battle.

"Your Majesty," he finished quietly, "I respect and admire you. The officers who deserted are not scoundrels. They were merely confronted with a choice and they chose not

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to participate in an attack on things as they are. I doubt if I could put it more honestly than that."

She doubted it too. Here was a man who would never understand the realistic necessity of what she was doing.

After she had dismissed him she noted his name down in her check-file, commenting that she wanted to hear the verdict of his court martial. The action of writing the words reminded her of her inability to remember the name of the man whom Colonel Medlon was to produce by morning.

She leafed the pages, and found it immediately. "Cayle Clark," she said aloud. "That's he."

She saw by her watch that it was time to go to the Treasury Department and hear all the reasons why it was impossible to spend more money.

She stood up with a wry smile, went out of her study and took a private elevator up to the fiftieth floor.

CHAPTER XVI

Report

WE WERE married (said Lucy in her disjointed report to the coordination department of the weapon shops) shortly before noon, Friday, the day he landed from Mars. I do not know how to account for the fact that a later check-up revealed he had not landed until 2 o'clock, nor have I confronted him with this information. I will ask him about it only if I am specifically requested to do so.

I do not desire to guess how he was able to marry me before the hour of the ship's arrival. There is no question in my mind, however. The man I married is Cayle Clark. It is impossible that I have been fooled by somebody representing himself to be Cayle.

He has just made his daily state call to me, but he does not know I am making this report. I am beginning to feel that it is wrong for me to make any reports whatever about him. But, the general circumstances being what they are, I am, as requested, trying to recall every detail of what happened. I will begin with the moment that I received a 'stat call from him on the morning of his arrival from Mars.

The time, as I remember it, was about half past ten. That conversation was extremely brief. We exchanged greetings, and then he asked me to marry him. My feelings about Cayle Clark are well known to the head of the coordination department. And I am sure Mr. Hedrock will not be surprised that I agreed instantly to the proposal, and that we signed our marriage declarations on the registered circuit a few minutes before noon that same morning.

We then went to my apartment, where, with one interruption, we remained the rest of that day and that night. The interruption came at a quarter to two when he asked me if I would take a walk around the block while he used my 'stat for a call. He did not say whether the call would be incoming or outgoing but, on returning, I noticed on the 'stat meter that it had been an incoming call.

I do not apologize for leaving the apartment at his request. My acquiescence seems to me absolutely normal.

During the course of the day and evening, he made no further reference to the call but instead described to me everything that had happened to him since I last saw him in the house of illusion. I do confess that his account at times was not so clear as it might have been and he more than once gave me the impression that he was relating events which had happened to him a considerable time ago.

The morning after our marriage, he was up early, and said that he had many things to do. Since I was anxious to call up Mr. Hedrock I let him go without objection. The subsequent report of another weapon shop agent that a very expensive private carplane picked him up a block from the apartment and took off before the agent could summon transportation—well, frankly, I cannot understand it.

Since then, Cayle has not been to the apartment but he has called me up every morning and told me that he cannot give me the details as yet about what he is doing, but that he loves me as much as ever.

I shall accept that until he himself tells me otherwise.

I have no knowledge at all of the report that he has for more than a month been a captain in Her Majesty's army. I do not know how he managed to obtain a commission, nor by what means he is pushing his interests. If it is true, as reported, that he has already been attached to the personal

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staff of the Empress, then I can only express amazement and speculate privately as to how he has managed it.

In conclusion, let me affirm my faith in Cayle. I cannot account for his actions but I believe that the end-result will be honorable.

(Signed) Lucy Rall Clark
November 14, 4784 I.

CHAPTER XVII

High Callidity

THIS was it. For a month Hedrock had delayed his reaction, waiting for new evidence. But now, reading Lucy's document, the conviction came. The unexpected turn of events that he had been waiting for was happening. What it was he had no idea. He felt a tensed alarm, the fear that he was missing vital clues. But doubt he had none—this was it.

Perspiring a little he reread the girl's statement. And it seemed to him then that Lucy was developing a negative attitude toward the weapon shops. It was not in what she had done but that she felt her actions might be misinterpreted. That was defensive, and therefore bad. The hold of the shops on its members was psychological.

Usually, when anyone wanted to break away, he was divested of vital memories, given a bonus depending on length of service and shooed off with the blessings of the organization. But Lucy was a key contact during a great crisis. The conflict between her duties to the shops and her personal situation must not be allowed to become too disturbing.

Hedrock frowned over the problem, then dialed the 'stat. Lucy's face came onto the screen, Hedrock said earnestly, "I have just read your statement, Lucy, and I want to thank you for your cooperation. We appreciate your position thoroughly and I have been asked" —he worded it deliberately as if an executive group were behind what he was saying— "I have been asked to request that you hold yourself ready for a call from us night and day until the critical period is over.

"In return, the weapon shops will do everything in their power to protect your husband from any dangerous reactions that may result from what he is doing."

It was no light promise. He had already handed the assignment over to the protective branch. Insofar as it was possible to protect a man in the Imperial sphere the job was being done. He watched Lucy's face casually but intently.

Intelligent though she was, she would never fully comprehend the weapon shop-Isher war. It didn't show. No guns were firing. Nobody was being killed. And even if the weapon shops were destroyed Lucy would not immediately notice the difference. Her life might never be affected and not even the immortal man could say what the pattern of existence would be when one of the two power facets of the culture was eliminated. He saw that Lucy was not satisfied with what he had said.

He hesitated, then, "Mrs. Clark, on the day you were married you took your husband's callidity measurements and gave them to us. We have never told you the integrated result because we did not want to alarm you. I think, however, that you will be interested rather than anxious."

"They're special?" Lucy asked.

"*Special!*" Hedrock searched for adjectives. "Your husband's callidity at the time you measured him was the highest that has ever been recorded in the history of the Information Center. The index has nothing to do with gambling and we cannot guess what form it will take but that it will affect the whole world of Isher we have no doubt."

WITH troubled eyes he gazed at her The devasting aspect of the affair was that Cayle Clark was not doing anything. There he was, attached to the personal staff of the Empress, his movements accounted for by a host of spies—well, almost all his movements. Several 'stat calls he had made from the palace had proved too private for interference. And twice he had slipped away from the palace, and eluded his shadows.

Minor incidents—they could scarcely account for the fact that, according to his callidetic measurement, what was happening was happening ***now***. The great event, whatever it was, was taking place—and not even the No-men of the shops were able to guess what it was.

Hedrock explained the situation, then, "Lucy," he said earnestly, "are you sure you have held nothing back? I swear to you it is a

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matter of life and death, particularly his life."

The girl shook her head. And though he watched closely her eyes did not change, showed not a trace of myopia. They widened but that was another phenomenon. Her mouth remained firm, which was a good sign.

It was impossible to tell, of course, just by looking at her physical reactions—except that Lucy Rall was not known ever to have taken evasive training. Where Robert Hedrock could lie, without giving one of the known lie-reactions Lucy simply didn't have the experience or nerve-control training to stifle the unconscious signals of her muscles.

"Mr. Hedrock," she said, "you know that you can count on me to the limit."

That was a victory for his immediate purpose. But he broke the connection, dissatisfied, not with Lucy or with the other agents, but with himself. He was missing something. His mind was not seeing deep enough into reality.

Just as the solution to the seesaw problem was eluding him, so now he was baffled by what must already be very apparent. Sitting here in his office, mulling over facts and figures, he was too far from the scene.

It was clearly time for an on-the-spot investigation by Robert Hedrock in person.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Twins

HEDROCK walked slowly along the Avenue of Luck savoring the difference in its appearance. He couldn't recall just when he had last been on the street, but it seemed a long, long time ago.

There were more establishments than he remembered, but not many changes otherwise. A hundred years did not affect the structural metals and materials of a building constructed under the rigid Isher regulations. The general architectural designs remained the same. The decorations were different. New lighting façades, planned to attract the eye, confronted him in every direction. The science of refurbishing had not been neglected.

He entered the Penny Palace, undecided as to what level of action he should pursue. He favored the irresistible approach but—he thought—better leave the decision about that for the moment. As he walked into the "treasure room" a ring on his little finger tingled. A transparency was probing him—from his right.

He walked on, then turned casually to examine the two men from whose direction the impulse had come. Were they employees or independents? Since he always carried about fifty-thousand credits on him, independent sharpers would be a nuisance. He smiled gently as he came up to them.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "Forget any plans you had, eh?"

The heavier of the two men reached into a coat pocket, then shrugged. "You're not carrying a weapon shop gun," he said pointedly. "You're not armed at all."

Hedrock said, "Would you like to test that?" And looked straight at the man's eyes.

The gambler was the first to glance away. "C'mon, Jay," he said. "This job isn't the way I figured it."

Hedrock stopped him as he turned away. "Work here?"

The man shook his head. "Not," he said frankly, "if you're against it."

Hedrock laughed. "I want to see the boss."

"That's what I thought," the man said. "Well, it was a good job while it lasted."

This time Hedrock let them go. He felt no surprise at their reaction. The secret of human power was confidence. And the confidence they had seen in his eyes was rooted in certainties of which most men had never heard. In all the world there had never been a man armed as he was with mental, physical, emotional, neural and molecular defenses.

Lucy's description of Martin's office made it unnecessary for him to explore. He entered the corridor at the back of the gambling section. As he closed the door behind him, a net fell over him, neatly enveloping his whole body. It drew instantly tight and pulled him several feet above the floor.

Hedrock made no effort to free himself. There was enough light for him to see the floor five feet below, and the indignity of his position did not disturb him. He had time for several thoughts. So Harj Martin had become wary of uninvited visitors. It proved something; just what, he would leave to the moment of meeting.

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He had not long to wait. Footsteps sounded. The door opened, and the fat man came in. He turned on a bright light and stood with a jolly look on his face, staring up at his prisoner.

"Well," he said, "what have we got here?"

He stopped. His eye had caught Hedrock's. Some of the jolliness faded from his expression.

"Who are you," he snapped.

Hedrock said, "On or about the night of October fifth, you were visited here by a young man named Cayle Clark. What happened?"

"I'll do the questioning," said Martin. Once again his eyes met Hedrock's. "Say," he said querulously, "who *are* you?"

Hedrock made a gesture. It was very carefully timed and estimated. One of the rings on his fingers dissolved the hard materials of the net. It parted beneath him like a door opening. He landed on his feet.

He said, "Start talking, my friend. I'm in a hurry."

IGNORING the gun that Martin snatched, he brushed past him into the large office. When he spoke again the confidence was in his voice. It required only a few moments after that for the resigned gambling palace operator to decide on cooperation.

"If all you want is information, okay." He added, "Your date is right. It was October fifth about midnight when this guy Clark came in here. He had his twin brother with him."

Hedrock nodded, but said nothing. He was not here for discussion.

"Boy," said Martin, "they were the most cold-blooded twins I ever saw and they worked together like a team. One of them must have had some Army experience, because he stood—well, you know the hypnotaxic posture they get. He was the one who knew everything and was he ever tough!

"I started to say something about not being a sucker and I got a blast across my leg. I made a bit too fast a move when I turned to pump the money out of the safe and another blast took off some of my hair."

He pointed at a bald spot on one side of his head. Hedrock examined it briefly. It had been close but obviously trained shooting. Weapon shop or Army. By elimination, Army.

"You're all right," he commented.

Martin shuddered. "That guy wasn't worrying whether I was all right or not." He finished, complainingly, "Life is getting too tough. I never knew the normal defense devices of Isher could be so easily nullified."

Outside Hedrock headed for a carplane stop in a meditative mood. The existence of the two Cayles was now established. And one of them had been in the Army long enough to receive more than the preliminary officer trainings.

He had that training on October fifth, a mere one day after Cayle Clark's arrival from Mars. By the morning of the sixth, the day Clark joined the Army, according to the record, he had 500,000 credits.

It was a nice stake for a young man trying to get ahead. But it scarcely accounted for certain things that were happening. And, large though it was, it was a tiny sum when considered in its relation to Cayle Clark's callidetic index—if the callidity were due to follow a money pattern.

His carplane arrived and the thought ended. He had one more call to make this morning—Colonel Medlon.

CHAPTER XIX

Seesaw

ROBERT HEDROCK returned to his office in the Hotel Royal Ganeel shortly after midday. He examined the reports that had come in during his absence, then spent two hours on a private telestat with an economic expert at the weapon shop Information Center. Then he called the members of the weapon makers' Council, and requested an immediate plenary session.

It required about ten minutes for the full Council to assemble in the council chamber of the hotel. Dresley opened the meeting.

"Looks to me, gentlemen," he said, "as if our coordinator has struck a warm trail. Right, Mr. Hedrock."

Hedrock came forward, smiling. Last time, in speaking to a delegation of this council, he had had the pressure of the time map *and* the Empress on his spirit. The map was still in the building, its problem unsolved, becoming more urgent every hour. But now he had one solution. He began without preliminary.

"Gentlemen, on the morning of November

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twenty-seventh, twelve days hence, we will send a message to the Isher Empress, and request her to end her war. We will accompany our request with facts and figures that will convince her she has no alternative."

He expected a sensation, and he got it. These men knew that, when it came to his job, he was not one to raise false hopes (they had yet to discover that his efficiency was equally great in other fields). Feet stirred and there was excitement.

Peter Cadron said explosively, *"Man!* don't keep us in suspense. What have you discovered?"

"Permit me," said Hedrock, "to recapitulate."

He went on, "As you are aware, on the morning of June third, four thousand seven hundred and eighty-four Isher, a man from the year nineteen hundred and forty-seven A.D. appeared in our Greenway weapon shop. The discovery was then made that the Empress was directing a new energy against all Imperial City weapon shops.

"This energy was a form of atomic power, old in nature but new to science. Its discovery heralds another step forward in our understanding of the complex structure of the space-time tensions that make for the existence of matter.

"The source of the energy in Imperial City was a building completed a year ago and located on Capital Avenue. Its effect on the Greenway shop differed from its effect on shops farther away.

"Theoretically it should have destroyed any material structure instantly but, though the Isher rulers have never known it, weapon shops are not made of matter in the accepted sense. And so there was an intricate interplay of gigantic forces that took place predominantly in time itself. And so a man came seven thousand years out of the past."

HE described briefly, using pure mathematical terms, the seesaw action of the man and the building, once they were launched into the abyss of time. He went on.

"There are still people who cannot understand how there can be a time swing, when it is a macrocosmic fact that the sun and its planets move steadily through space-time at twelve-plus miles a second, in addition to which the planets follow an orbital course around the sun at varying speeds.

"By this logic it should follow that, if you go into the past or future, you will find yourself at some remote point in space, far from Earth. It is hard for people who think thus to realize that space is a fiction, a by-product of the basic time-energy, and that a matter tension like a planet does not influence phenomena in the time stream, but is itself subject to the time energy laws.

"The reason for the balancing for two hours and forty minutes after every swing is obscure, but it has been suggested that nature unrelentingly seeks stability. The building, when it swings into the past, occupies the same 'space' as it did in normal time but there are no repercussions—for the reason that similarity is a function of time itself, not of its tension-product. McAllister started at seven thousand years, the building at two seconds. That is approximate.

"Today the man is several quadrillions of years away and the building swings at a distance of somewhat less than three months. The fulcrum, of course, moves forward in our time, so that we have the following situation—the building no longer swings back in time as far as June third, where the seesaw originally started.

"Please bear these facts in mind while I turn briefly to another division of this seemingly complicated but basically simple business."

Hedrock paused. There were quick minds in this room. It interested him to see that every face was still expectant. Now that he himself knew the truth it seemed queer that they had not yet grasped the reality. He continued.

"Gentlemen, the Coordination Department discovered some months ago that there existed in the village of Glay a callidetic giant. With so much internal pressure pushing him we had no difficulty maneuvering him into coming to Imperial City.

"At first, our belief that he would influence events markedly was nullified by his ignorance of Isher realities. I won't go into the details but he was shipped to Mars as a common laborer. He was able to return almost immediately."

He went on to explain how Lucy Rall had been married to one Cayle Clark a few hours before the arrival of the ship that brought Cayle Clark back to earth, how the two Clarks secured 500,000 credits, then visited Colonel Medlon, one of them disguised.

The visit was a fortunate one for Medlon. He had just been asked by the Empress to

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produce Clark, or else. A captaincy was conferred on Clark, with the usual hypnotic machine training for officers. The following day he reported to the Empress.

"For a reason which she considers to have been impulse, but which is traceable to his callidity, she attached him to her personal staff and he is there now. Wherever his power extends he has followed a curious system of eliminating corruption, which has aroused the interest of the ambitious Innelda. Even if nothing else worked in his favor he would appear to be a young man destined to go far in the Imperial service."

THEN Hedrock smiled. "Actually, the Cayle Clark to watch is not the one in the open but the one who remained elusively in the city. It is that Clark who has been making history since last August seventh. In that time he has achieved the following successes—and gentlemen, I warn you, you've never heard anything like this before.

"On August eighth, a man operating under the name of C. Cayle entered the stock market and, by an unparalleled understanding of the movements of prices, using some five hundred thousand credits as a basis of operations, won in the month of August ninety *billion* credits. In this series of deals he took over one of the chain banks, four billion-credit industrial establishments and obtained partial control of thirty-four other companies.

"During the month of September he made three hundred and thirty billion credits and absorbed the colossal First Imperial Bank, three interplanetary mining corporations and part ownership of two hundred and ninety companies.

"By the end of September, he was established in a hundred-story skyscraper in the heart of the financial district, having given Employment Incorporated the job of setting him up in business overnight. On September thirtieth he had seven thousand employees working in the building.

"In October every spare cent he made was invested in available hotel and residential properties, a total of three and one-eighth *trillion* credits worth. During the past two weeks he has done very little, partly explainable, I think, by the sheer inability of one mind to grasp and understand the complex involvements of the deals that Clark engaged in.

"He has three floors of lawyers in his building. But they are just beginning to understand what they have to do. From November first until now he has acquired a hundred billion in assets and money by simple investments.

"So much for the financial end of his activities. On October fourth Clark called our Miss Lucy Rall, and married her the same day."

There was an interruption. "But good heavens!" said a man. "How did he *do* all this?" The speaker parted his lips to say more, then closed them. A startled look came into his face. He sagged in his chair. But the sudden comprehension that came to him was shared explosively with the other Councilors. For a minute, the table buzzed with excited discussion.

Then a man said, "Why did he feel it necessary to obtain the initial money from Martin, of the Penny Palace?"

"Sir," said Hedrock, "he dared not fool with the phenomenon that had happened to him."

"But why marry Lucy Rall?"

"Partly love, partly—" Hedrock hesitated. He had asked Lucy a pointed question and her answer made his reply possible now. "I would say he grew immensely cautious, and began to think of the future. Basic urges came to the fore.

"Suppose something happened to a man who had in a few weeks created a financial and industrial empire. Gentlemen, he wanted an heir and Lucy was the only honest girl he knew. It may be a permanent arrangement—I cannot say.

"Clark, in spite of his rebellion against his parents is essentially a well-brought-up young man. In any event Lucy will not suffer. She will have the interesting experience of having a child. And, as a wife, she has community property rights."

Peter Cadron climbed to his feet. "Gentlemen," he said, "I move a vote of thanks to Robert Hedrock for the service he has rendered the weapon shops."

The applause was prolonged.

"I move, furthermore," said Peter Cadron, "that he be given the rank of unrestricted member."

Once more there were no dissenters. Hedrock bowed his appreciation. The reward was more than an honor. As an unrestricted member he would be subject only to the Pp machine examinations.

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His movements and actions would never be scrutinized and he could use every facility of the shops as if they were his own property. He had been doing it anyway but in future there would be no suspicion. It was a mighty gift.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said, when the clapping ended.

"And now," said Peter Cadron, "I respectfully request Mr. Hedrock to leave the council room while we discuss our remaining problems, the seesaw."

Hedrock went out gloomily. He had momentarily forgotten that the greatest danger remained.

CHAPTER XX

Paradox in Time

IT was November twenty-sixth, one day before the shops intended to inform the Empress that her war was lost. She had no premonition. She had come down to the building to see and, perhaps—perhaps to do as Captain Clark had suggested. She still felt repelled, though without fear. The feeling she had was that the Empress of Isher must not involve her own person in harebrained adventures.

Yet the thought had grown and here she was. At the very least she would watch and wait while Captain Clark and the scientists made the trip. She climbed briskly out of her carplane and looked around her.

In the near distance a concealing haze rose up lazily into the sky, an artificial fog that, for months now, had cut off this city district from the view of the curious. She walked slowly forward, her distinctive Isher face turning this way and that as she examined the scene. She beckoned Captain Clark. "When is the building due?"

The smiling young man saluted briskly. "In seven minutes, Your Majesty."

"Have you all the necessary equipment?"

She listened carefully to his recapitulation. Seven groups of scientists would enter the building, each with his own instrument. It was a pleasure to realize that Captain Clark had personally checked over the lists of machines with each group.

"Captain," she glowed, "you're a treasure."

Cayle said nothing. Her praise meant nothing. This girl, who almost literally owned the world, surely did not expect intelligent people to be absolutely faithful to her in exchange for a few compliments and Army pay.

He had no sense of anticipatory guilt and in fact did not regard what he intended to do as being in any way damaging to her. In Isher you did what was necessary and for him there was no turning back. The pattern of his action was already set.

The woman was looking over the scene again. The hole in the ground, where the building had been, was to her right. To her left was the Greenway weapon shop with its park. It was the first time she had seen one in which the glitter signs were not working. That made her feel better. The shop seemed strangely isolated there in the shadows of its trees. She clenched her hands and thought.

If all the weapon shops in the Solar System were suddenly eliminated the few thousand parklike lots where they had been could be so easily converted into almost anything that—in one generation, she told herself with a dark certainty—they'd be forgotten. The new children would grow up wondering what mythological nonsense their elders were talking.

"By all the gods of space," she said aloud, passionately, "it's going to happen."

Her words were like a cue. The air shimmered strangely. And where there had been an enormous symmetrical hole abruptly towered a building.

"Right on the minute," said Captain Cayle Clark beside her, with satisfaction.

Innelda stared at the structure, chilled. She had watched this process once on a telestat screen. It was different being on the scene. For one thing the size showed up better. For a quarter of a mile it reared up into the heavens, solid in its alloyed steel-and-plastic construction, as wide and long as it was high.

It had to be large, of course. The engineers had stipulated oversized vacuums between the various energy rooms. The actual living space inside was tiny. It took about an hour to inspect all the levels.

"Well," said Innelda, relieved, "the place doesn't seem to have been damaged in any way by its experiences. What about the rats?"

The rats had been placed in the building

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during an earlier appearance. So far, they had showed no sign of being affected. It was wise, though, to verify that they were still unharmed. She waited now in an upper room, glancing intermittently at her watch, as the minutes fled by.

IT was annoying to realize that she was nervous. But, standing here in the virtual silence of an almost empty building, she felt that perhaps she was being foolish in even considering going along. She glanced at the men who had volunteered to accompany her if she went. Their silence was not normal and they did not look at her—but stood moodily gazing through the transparent wall.

There was a sound—footsteps. Captain Cayle Clark came striding into view. He was smiling and in his cupped hands he held a white rat. "Your Majesty," he said, "just look at him. Bright as a button."

He was so cheerful that, when he held the little animal out to her, she took it and stared down at it thoughtfully. On abrupt impulse, she drew it up and pressed its warm body against her cheek.

"What would we do," she murmured, "without lovely little rats like you?" She glanced at Captain Clark. "Well, sir," she said, "what's the scientific opinion?"

"Every rat," Clark said, "is organically, emotionally and psychologically sound. All the tests that show rats for what they are were favorable."

Innelda nodded. It fitted. At the beginning, on the day the first attack was launched, before the men inside the building knew what was happening, the structure had disappeared once, causing an immense confusion inside and of which she had never received a coherent account.

The moment, on that occasion, the building reappeared, all personnel was withdrawn and no one had been permitted to take the "trip" since then. But physical examinations of the men proved them unharmed.

Still Innelda hesitated. It would look bad now, if she failed to go along, but there were so many factors to be considered. If anything happened to her the Isher government might fall. She had no direct heir, which was not good.

The succession would fall to Prince del Curtin, who was popular but known by many people to be out of her favor. The whole situation was ridiculous. She felt hedged in but there was no use denying the reality.

"Captain," she said firmly, "you have volunteered to take this—journey—whether I go or not. I have definitely decided not to go. I wish you luck and wish, too, that I could go with you. But I'm afraid that I mustn't. As Empress I do not feel free for light-hearted adventures."

She held out her hand. "Go with my blessing."

Less than an hour later, she watched as the building flicked into nothingness. She waited. Food was brought. She ate it in her carplane, read several state papers she had brought along and then, as darkness fell over the capital city of her empire, saw by her watch that once more the building was due back.

It flashed into view and presently men began to troop out. One of the scientists came over.

"Your majesty," he said, "the journey was accomplished without incident, except for one thing. Captain Clark, as you know, intended to leave the building for exploration purposes. He did leave it. We received one message from him, spoken into his wrist 'stat, to the effect that the date was August seventh, four thousand hundred and eighty-four Isher.

"That was the last we heard. Something must have happened to him. He failed to come back in time to make the return journey with us."

"But—" said Innelda. She stopped blankly. Then, "But that means, from August seventh to November twenty-sixth there were two Cayle Clarks in existence, the normal and the one who went back in time."

She paused uncertain. "The old time paradox," she frowned to herself. "Can man go back in time and shake hands with himself?"

Aloud she said, wonderingly, "But whatever became of the second one?"

She learned the answer to that the following morning. For two days she endured the agony of accepting utter defeat. And then . . .

CHAPTER XXI

Resolution of Time-Space

THE Empress said, "Mr. de Lany." Hedrock bowed. He had disguised

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himself slightly, and taken one of his long discarded names so that she would not recognize him at some future date.

"You have sought an interview?" said the Empress of Isher.

"As you see."

She toyed with his card. She had on a snow-white gown, that accentuated the tan of her face and neck. The room in which she received him had been made up to resemble a small south sea island. Palms and green growth surrounded them. And on every side was water, lapping on a beach as real as nature. A cool wind blew from that restless sea onto Hedrock's back and into her face.

The woman gazed bitterly at Hedrock. She saw a man of earnest mien and commanding appearance. But it was his eyes that startled her. They were strong and kind and infinitely brave. She hadn't expected such special qualities. The visitor took on sudden importance. She looked down at the card again.

"Walter de Lany," she said thoughtfully.

She seemed to listen to the name, as she spoke it, as if she expected it to acquire meaning. Finally she shook her head, wonderingly.

"How did you get in here? I found this appointment on my list and took it for granted that the chamberlain must have arranged it because it involved necessary business."

Hedrock said nothing. Like so many Imperials the chamberlain lacked the defensive mind trainings. And, though the Empress herself had them, she did not know that the weapon shops had developed energy methods for forcing instantaneous favorable response from the unprotected. The woman spoke again.

"Very strange," she said.

Hedrock said, "Reassure yourself, Madam. I have come to solicit your mercy on behalf of an unfortunate guiltless man."

That caught her. Once more her eyes met his, flinched from the strength that was there, then steadied.

Hedrock said quietly, "Your majesty, you are in a position to do an act of unparalleled kindness to a man who is nearly five million million years from here, swinging from past to future as your building forces him ever further away."

The words had to be spoken. He expected her to realize instantly that only her intimates and her enemies would know about the vanishing building. The way the color drained from her cheeks showed that she was realizing.

"You're a weapon shop man?" she whispered. She was on her feet. "Get out of here," she breathed. "Out!"

Hedrock stood up. "Your Majesty," he said, "control yourself. You are in no danger."

He intended his words to be like a dash of cold water. The suggestion that she was afraid brought splotches of color into her cheeks. She stood like that for a moment and then, with a quick movement, reached into the bosom of her dress and drew out a gleaming white energy weapon.

"If you do not leave instantly," she said, "I shall fire."

Hedrock held his arms away from his body like a man being searched. "An ordinary gun," he said in amazement, "against a man who carries a weapon shop defensive? Madam," he said, "if you will listen to me for a moment—"

"I do not," said the Empress, "deal with weapon shop people."

That was merely irritating. "Your Majesty," said Hedrock in a level voice, "I am surprised that you make such immature statements. You have not only been dealing with the shops the last few days you have yielded to them. You have been compelled to end the war and to destroy your time-energy machines. You have agreed not to prosecute the officer-deserters but only to discharge them. And you have granted immunity to Cayle Clark"

HE saw in her face that he had not touched her. She was staring at him, frowning. "There must be a reason," she said, "that you dare to talk to me like this."

Her own words seemed to galvanize her. She turned back to her chair and stood with finger poised over the ornamented arm of the seat.

"If I should press this alarm," she said, "it would bring guards."

Hedrock sighed. He had hoped she would not force him to reveal his power. "Why not, then," he suggested, "press it?"

It was time she found out her true situation.

The woman said, "You think I won't?"

Firmly, her extended finger pressed downward.

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There was silence except for the lapping of the waves and the soft sound of the life-like breeze. After at least two minutes Innelda, ignoring Hedrock as if he did not exist, walked twenty feet to a tree, and touched one of the branches.

It must have been another alarm, because she waited—not so long this time—and then walked hurriedly over to the thick brush that concealed the elevator shaft. She activated its mechanism and, when there was no response, came slowly back to where Hedrock waited, and sat down in her chair.

She was pale but composed. Her eyes did not look at him but her voice, when she spoke, was calm and without fear. "Do you intend to murder me?"

Hedrock shook his head but said nothing. More strongly now, he regretted that he had had to reveal to her how helpless she could be, particularly regretted it because she would undoubtedly start modernizing the defenses of the palace in the mistaken belief that she was protecting herself against superior weapon shop science.

He had come here this afternon prepared for any emergency, physical or mental. He could not force her to do what he wanted but his fingers blazed with offensive and defensive rings. He had on his "business" suit and even weapon shop scientists would have been amazed at the variety of his armor. In his vicinity no alarm energies would come to life and no guns would operate. It was the day of the greatest decision in the history of the Solar System, and he had come mightily girded.

The woman's eyes were staring at him with somber intensity. "What do you want?" she said. "What about this man you mentioned?"

Hedrock told her about McAllister.

"Are you mad?" she whispered when he had finished. "But why so far? The building is only—three months?".

"The ruling factor seems to be mass."

"Oh!" Silence, then, "But what do you want me to do?"

Hedrock said, "Your Majesty, this man commands our pity and our mercy. He is floating in a void whose like no human eyes will ever see again. He has looked upon our Earth and our sun in their infancy and in their old old age. Nothing can help him now. We must give him the surcease of death."

In her mind Innelda saw the night he pictured. But she was more intent now, seeing this event in its larger environment.

"What," she said, "about this machine you have?"

"It is a duplicate of the map machine of the weapon shops." He didn't explain that he had built it in one of his secret laboratories. "It lacks only the map itself, which was too intricate to fashion swiftly."

"I see." Her words were automatic, not a real response. She studied his face. She said slowly, "Where do you fit into all this?"

IT WAS a question that Hedrock was not prepared to answer. He had come to the Empress of Isher because she had suffered a defeat and, her position being what it was, it was important that she should not remain too resentful. An immortal man, who was once more interfering in the affairs of mortals, had to think of things like that.

"Madam," he said, "there is no time to waste. The building is due here again in one hour."

The woman said, "But why cannot we leave this decision up to the weapon shop council?"

"Because they might make the wrong decision."

"What," persisted Innelda, "is the right decision?"

Sitting there, Hedrock told her.

* * * * *

Cayle Clark set the controls so that the carplane would make a wide circle around the house.

"Oh my goodness!" said Lucy Rall Clark. "Why, it's one of these up-in-the-air places—"

She stopped and stared with wide, wondering eyes at the grounds below, at the hanging gardens, at the house floating in the air.

"Oh, Cayle," she said, "are you sure we can afford it?"

Cayle Clark smiled. "Darling, I've explained to you a dozen times. I'm not going to do it again."

She protested, "That isn't what I mean. Are you sure the Empress will let you get away with it?"

Cayle Clark gazed at his wife with a faint, grim smile. "Mr. Hedrock," he said slowly, "gave me a weapon shop gun. And besides, I did a great deal for Her Majesty which—at least, so she told me on the telestat today—she appreciates. She doesn't dissemble very

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much, so I have agreed to continue to work for her in much the same way."

"Oh!" said Lucy.

"Now, don't get yourself upset," said Cayle. "Remember, you yourself told me that the weapon shops believed in one government. The more that government is purified the better the world will be off. And believe me"—his face hardened—"I've had just enough experience to make me want to purify it."

He landed the carplane on the roof of the five-story residence. He led Lucy into the interior, down into the world of bright gracious rooms where she and he would live forever.

At least, at twenty-two, it seemed as if it would be forever.

McAllister opened his tired eyes, and saw that he was poised in black space. There was no Earth under him. He was in a time where Earth did not exist. The darkness seemed to be waiting for some colossal event.

Waiting for him.

He had a sudden flash of understanding of what was going to happen. Wonder came then—and resignation to death.

It was a strangely relaxing resignation. He was so weary. And there was a real stimulation in the thought that he would die so that others might live.

How it would be worked he had no idea. But somehow the tremendous time-energy that had been accumulating in him with each giant swing of the seesaw—somehow that would be released in the remote past.

Space itself would be torn by the tensions of that explosion.

The planets would be created.

Earth would start its swing around the sun. Life would begin its slow struggle toward intelligence.

Millions of millions of years hence he would be born.

And so in order that human kind could have life he must die.

NOW!

Strangest in the Universe

ANNOUNCEMENT recently by Dr. William J. Luyten of the University of Minnesota and Dr. David MacLeish of the Cordoba Observatory in Argentina of the discovery of nine new white dwarf stars brings the recorded number of these phenomena of the universe to exactly one hundred.

Erratic behavior by Sirius led to the theoretical discovery of the first of the white dwarfs years before it was spotted via telescope in 1862. For some fifty-three years it was believed to be merely an ordinary, virtually non-luminous dwarf star. Then, with the aid of the Mount Wilson telescope in 1915, it was discovered that it was white hot, a fact which baffled scientists.

Sir Arthur Eddington, the great English physicist, finally worked out a solution, computing that density so great that a cubic inch might weigh a thousand tons was possible even in a gaseous state if the heat were so terrific that the atoms were completely stripped of electrons, thus permitting incredibly dense packing—*Carter Sprague.*

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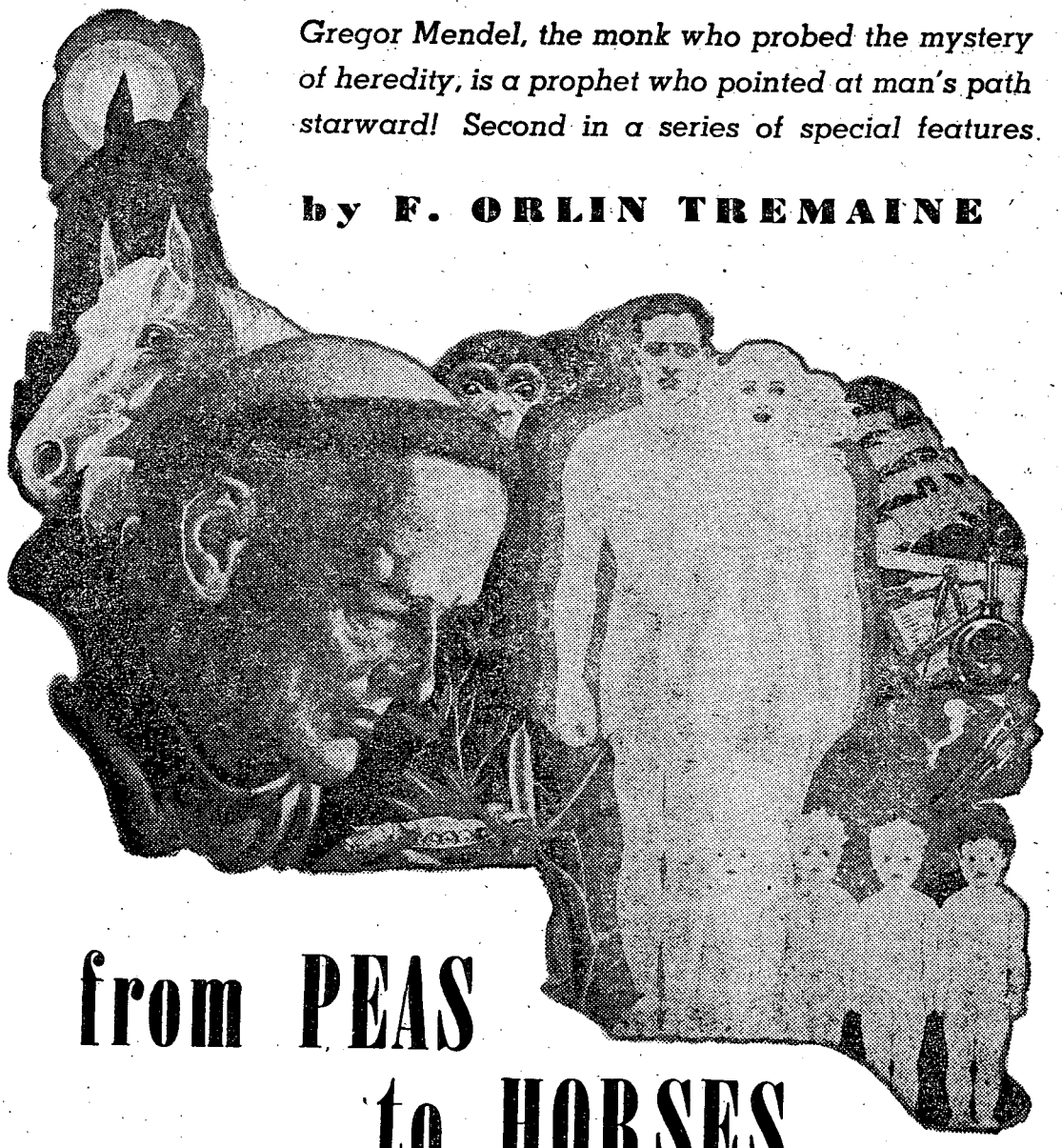
Gregor Mendel, the monk who probed the mystery of heredity, is a prophet who pointed at man's path starward! Second in a series of special features.

by F. ORLIN TREMAINE



from PEAS to HORSES to MEN

SUPPOSE you were looking at an old portrait, asked about it, and your host answered, *"It's a picture of one of my ancestors, a great-great-grandfather. He was a wonderful personality, a colonel in the War of Eighteen Hundred and Twelve. It's too bad I'm not related to him!"*

That remark would be sort of a shock, wouldn't it? You'd be apt to think your friend was a little crazy.

Actually such a remark would prove that the man had his feet on the ground—and if he were not already a success he would be on his way to it! Because he actually under-

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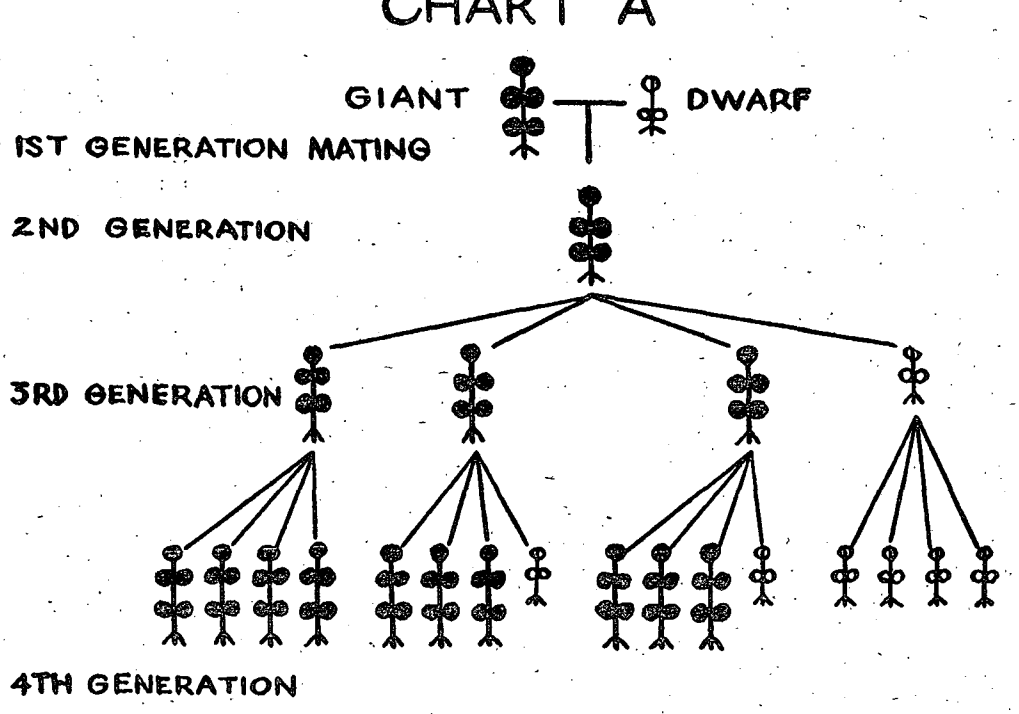

stood something about heredity and knew that it applies to the brain as well as to the body.

Such knowledge dates back to something that is familiar to many of us, "Mendel's Law." Gregor Mendel, a monk, kept a little patch of garden where he experimented by crossing green and yellow peas.

He proved that the qualities contributed by the parent-plants *separated* in the offspring *without having influenced or altered each other.* Although one parent naturally contributed a *green* trait and the other a *yellow,* all of the offspring-seeds of this union would be *yellow.*

Yet when the yellow peas of this second generation were planted, they bore *one-fourth green* peas, *three-fourths yellow* peas. Thus the principle of dominant and recessive traits had begun to appear, for green was dominated by yellow in the original cross-breeding.

Peas in a Pod

Properly crossed, these third generation hybrids began to prove a law of heredity in the fourth generation. Some maintained their green peas, others their yellow, having paired similar *genes.* Others, where the genes still crossed, produced three yellow and one green pea in each pod!

Mendel's formulae held in the case of giant and dwarf peas and in the cases of plants as well as seeds—and in the cases of peas with rough pods bred to peas with smooth pods. They held in the tests on guinea pigs and rabbits! Yet Mendel died unrecognized.

By the year 1900, biologists began to recognize the greatness of Mendel's discoveries. Breeders of race-horses began to produce strains of great animals by following Mendel's laws of *dominant* and *recessive* traits.

Chart A reveals the working of the Mendelian Law in giant and dwarf peas.

Peas in Your Eyes

But peas are simple plants and check only a single trait in their cross-breeding. The questions that follow are many. How does it apply to men? Men have very complicated bodies, with thousands upon thousands of trait factors. Is it possible even to calculate your inherited traits and mine on the same basis?

It is, of course. Take a single trait, like

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the color of the eyes. The appearance of blue and brown eyes in a family follows the identical laws that govern the appearance of *yellow* and *green* peas. *Yellow* peas are dominant over *green*—*brown* eyes are dominant over *blue* and the two will appear in exactly the same proportion of offspring in following generations.

You can look at a person's eyes, ask about those of his brothers and sisters and tell him quite accurately the color of the eyes of his parents, grandparents and farther back if you wish to calculate. Set up such a chart and you can tell him the percentage of blue and of brown-eyed children and grand-children he is apt to have.

And the eye-color is only the beginning! The same laws apply to every feature of the body—and to every trait of the brain!

To show you how perfectly these laws work let's jump to an experiment in horse-breeding which shows how certain ancestral strains are eliminated from a complicated animal body. This is really a startling chart because it proves the scope of the Mendelian law under ideal test conditions.

Two separate matings are made between two pure-blooded Arabian horses, and two pure-blooded Percherons. Many such tests have proved that it does not matter which are male and which are female. The results in the offspring are the same in characteristics.

You will notice that, since many traits are involved here, instead of the single one studied in peas, the hybrid second generation of colts is variable throughout. Cross-breeding the two hybrid strains accentuated certain characteristics in the third generation.

But, on the law of averages which requires 24 colts to work out, all-Arabian genes will dominate in 1, and all-Percheron genes will meet in another so that we have an almost unbelievable result. Twenty-two of the colts are hybrid-mongrels in which the crossed characteristics of the grandparents show in various ways.

But one of the colts is a pure-blooded Percheron, without a trace of Arabian in his system. He will breed true. He is a Percheron. He is *not* related to two of his grandparents in any slightest degree!

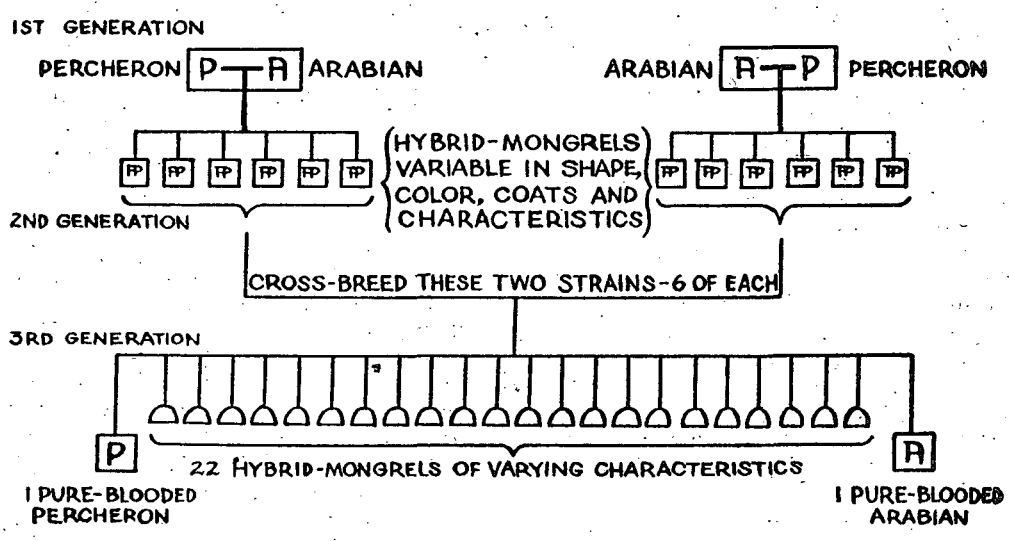
Another of the colts is a pure-blooded Arabian, which is not related in any degree to its two Percheron grandparents! It too will breed true.

Logical Elimination

Isn't it quite logical to believe that, although we can't prove it as clearly, among the other 22 hybrid-mongrels some of them have eliminated two of their grandparental strains also? Only, in their cases, they would have eliminated one Percheron and one Arabian strain. We won't press on that point at the moment but will leave it to speculate on.

We know, however, that two out of twenty-four colts have not a single trace of re-

CHART B



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lationship to two of their four grandparents. Therefore these two prove a point. They could not possibly be related to more than 32 of their 64 great-great-great-great grandparents! And the odds are, as we said in the last issue, that the hereditary traits do not link to more than two, or at the most three, ancestors of any generation.

And, since our traits are inherited in accordance with Mendelian law—eye-color being a clear example—genealogical records take on new importance. Instead of genealogy being a toy to play around with if you can afford it, we find that it can guide us toward success when studied properly.

So, in a few short pages, we have moved from peas to horses to men. We have knocked a lot of your supposed ancestors right out of your background, and have given you a good look at some of the reasons why you are an individual different from any other individual who ever lived on earth!

Of course you can still claim all these ancestors in your family tree but you are deceiving yourself if you do more than that. Your job, if you want to understand your own brain, is to learn *whose* traits were dominant among your ancestors, and which of them gave you the strong traits and inner desires which you yourself know best.

Family Differences

You have noticed that you do not always agree with your brothers and sisters. You may have some interests in common, some of the same character traits—but you do not look alike or think alike, because the life-cell from which each of you developed was made up of different gene-groups.

One of you may be the "*spitten image*" of a great-grandfather, both mentally and physically. Another may "take after" a great-aunt in both appearance and habit (in which case both parties gained the inheritance from someone still farther back in the ancestry). It may seem a little confusing until you think about it.

But if you set up a chart showing the relationships between similar individuals in the family—there will be no confusion because they will fall in place perfectly under the Mendelian law of dominant and recessive trait recurrence.

Of course this knocks a lot of alibis for a loop, also. It is not true that you inherit a weakness or a streak of wildness or anything else from your father or your mother. You've noticed that on the charts.

You inherit traits *through* your parents, not from them. The traits are inherited from the generations farther back—mostly from your grandparents and great-grandparents but sometimes from the 5th, 6th, or 7th generation back—and on rare occasions as far back as the 11th generation!

Here's an example. Some years ago twin sons were born to Mexican parents, Umberto and Rudolpho Rios of Catalina Island, California. One was dark like his parents, the other, an albino. The albinism was a trait recurrence from a great-great-great-grandmother, the sixth generation back.

Had the story that there had been an albino grandmother been unknown to the parents, the reason for the child's albinism would have been a mystery. Dr. Johanne Keeler is the authority for this case.

No Alibi

And another thing—don't get the idea that you have an excuse for not doing the things you *want* to do and in which you prove to be skilled, just because you can find no record of any ancestor having done these things. Nobody's great-great grandfather was a bus driver! There weren't any buses in those days. What you inherit are the basic skills of the body and mind.

You've probably heard some expression similar to this, "The boy ought to be a good violinist. His father was a violinist and his grandfather was a violinist."

Our answer to a statement like that is simple and to the point. "Yes, true. But you can't inherit a horse's tail (the bow) and a cat's intestine (the violin strings).

What you inherit is basic—finger-skill, an ear for tone, a sense of rhythm. Perhaps you miss on one. Maybe you just inherited the finger skill. That's useful in playing a violin or in making watches—or in picking pockets! The use you make of the traits you inherit depends on two other things, environment and free will. These are the three forces which control your destiny.

You Can't Meddle With Heredity

You inherit certain skills, but it lies with your own free will and choice what you will do with them. And you can't blame your environment too much, because you are a

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free agent. You can change your environment if you so desire. You aren't rooted like a tree. You can move!

All of which shows why it is silly for a father, who happens to be a lawyer, to insist that his son be a lawyer if the son wants to be a cabinet-maker and shows that his skill and his desire lie in that direction.

On the other hand, if the boy's grandfather was also a lawyer—and if there are *four* sons, one is bound to *want* to be a lawyer and to show his skill lies in that direction. That's the Mendelian law working!

Because we have not been in the habit of thinking about our own human inheritance sensibly we have to turn to animals for examples. But when horsemen want to check the ability of a racehorse they turn immediately to the ability record of his ancestors.

They study the special traits and habits of his sires and dams through several generations, searching for possible weaknesses, strengths, peculiarities and special traits. For in his heredity lies the key and the secret of his future accomplishments.

Improving the Breed

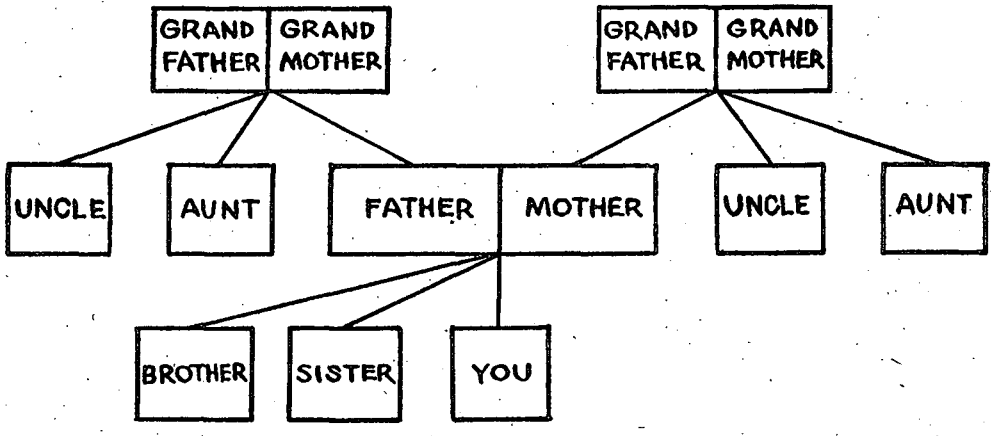
Horsemen know from long experience that a speedy *strain* of horseflesh does not produce colts and fillies that will be plow-horses. Some of the colts will be faster than others—but they will all be fast. There are many trait-factors to be checked among their ancestors as well as speed.

One will run better under a blazing sun. Another will run best in mud! There is a "wind-factor" that makes one do his best on a fast mile run. Another is extremely fast on a half-mile run but tires after that. One runs best when he is in the lead, another when overtaking another horse. Many other traits are checked in the genealogical record.

Whether or not a colt becomes an outstanding champion depends on other factors as well, including his training (environment) and his heart (free will)—and remember he is going to race against his own brothers and cousins! But he'll be fast.

When dairymen build herds for milk they segregate and raise the calves of cows which produce the most milk and mate them with bulls born of heavy milk-producing cows. By the time the fifth generation selection is made the dairyman *knows* the results will be dependable—and increasingly good.

CHART C



In the western cattle-country the cattlemen specialize on the beef-producing qualities of their cattle. Milk, here, is not the objective. Breeding has accomplished what they want also.

But a dairyman would be considered feeble minded if he stocked his dairy farm with beef-cattle. A ranchman would be laughed out of the West if he stocked his range with Jersey cows. We won't even talk about a horseman who tried to race a Percheron!

You will notice that, in every example given, every individual animal has some special knack or trait which excels others of his kind. That is one of the secrets of making

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use of genealogical data.

The purpose of the data is *not* to show a man that he is the last rag on the tail of a kite. It is to prove to him that HE *is the kite,* which can fly high because it has a tail which balances it in the wind. It shows you that this generation is the standard-bearer—not some past generation.

A Credit to Your Forebears

If you are to be a credit to your forebears *you must accomplish more* than they did. You were born with the benefits they struggled to create! Your brain inherited the experiences which they struggled through. Any person who thinks the accomplishments of his grandparents reflect credit on him is mentally bankrupt—unless he exceeds the accomplishments of those grandparents.

In other words it is up to you to reflect credit on your grandparents! They've done their job long since! This is your generation and you have much more to work with than they had when they were young!

Everybody has certain things in common with everybody else. The desire for food, clothing, shelter and companionship are universal. Certain other interests are common to groups of people, and you probably have interests in common with several groups.

For instance a church would bring you together with one group, your work with another, your hobby with a third, your recreation perhaps with a fourth. And you will have certain family interests which create other strong bonds that have nothing to do with any of the other groups to which you are attracted for one reason or another.

But there are certain interests, which take the form of deep-seated desires, that belong to you alone. And it is these special, completely personal interests whose usefulness we want to emphasize. Your thoughts turn to them because of the flow of thought from the thought-centers of your unconscious mind, your attention to them.

That is why, when you choose a hobby, you can sometimes *"lose yourself in it so that you can actually forget that time is passing."* At such moments of deep absorbing interest your conscious and unconscious minds are working in complete harmonious cooperation.

Think about this for a moment. It means that—if you can choose as your work some field in which you have this special, personal, interest—you will become absorbed in your work the same way because you will be using your conscious mind *and* the thoughts of your unconscious mind to help make your work outstanding.

Follow Your Hobby

Even if your work has had to be routine and your interest is satisfied only when you get to your hobby (or avocation), remember that many a person has developed his hobby until it became his full time work. That is one way to achieve success.

If you can think of your brain objectively, like an engineer examining an elaborate machine, all this will be as clear to you as the noonday sun. Consider the brain as a delicate yet powerful machine.

Its central office of a vast cable system links together every atom and cell of a great empire—your body—so that nothing can touch the most remote part without an instant report being recorded, and a command sent out as a result.

It is so efficient that, if heat is applied to one of your toes, the pain is signaled, the order sent and the foot is moved back *sometimes before the conscious mind has become aware of the pain.* That is efficient operation, independent of conscious thought and without reliance upon the conscious mind for orders.

This thought-generating machine is housed in a huge dome. It manufactures electrical impulses in short-wave form. In a standard alternating electric current (60 cycle) we have 60 impulses each second. That seems fast, but high-frequency waves sometimes run to incomparably higher speeds.

The brain impulses run about 500,000 per second, permitting an accuracy that is impossible even in our high-frequency electric bands. Naturally a force-field of tremendous potential surrounds it and permeates it and sometimes the force fields formed by each separate thought-center-generator in the unconscious contact the force-field formed by the conscious thought generator.

If the two wave-lengths are the same there is an automatic reinforcement of the conscious thought force-field where the two "flows" travel together. It is the accomplishments of these reinforcements that makes outstanding achievements possible, linking

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the logic of the conscious mind with the inherited memory-experiences of thought-centers in the unconscious mind.

It is not essential for you to have data concerning previous generations in order to examine your own mind and analyze your deep-seated desires and the longings which come through to your conscious attention in dreams, in daydreams and in hopes for the future.

But such data makes the examination much easier, because you can check back and confirm the fact that the desire is caused by the thought-centers of the unconscious by noting that a person similar in thought and experience did live in your ancestral line.

Most Histories Useless

It is definitely not necessary for you to run to a library and try to find a family history. Most such volumes are practically useless anyway! They give you birth dates, marriage dates and dates of death!

They tell you who married whom and where they moved and lived. They tell you soandso was a *freeman* and where he came from. They may even tell you who were farmers, merchants, soldiers. All of which is interesting but of only minor importance.

What you want is data which the histories mostly ignore and which you know to a large extent if you stop to think of it. You need only a simple chart indicating the position of the various names of persons in your "reachable" family, yourself, parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents. Possibly you can add your great-grandparents if you've grown up in an average family. Then get a sheet of paper for each person named on the chart, and go to work.

This article includes a simple Chart, Chart C, to which you can add as time passes. When you marry you will make out a similar chart covering your wife's (or husband's) family, thus setting up a guide for future generations; and letting you almost prophesy the characteristics of your children and grandchildren.

As you think of the matter you will find that you know a great deal about your parents, and quite a bit about your grandparents. Jot this information down in their sheets as you think of it. If your parents are living (or either of them) they can add a lot to what you know both about themselves and about your grandparents—and they can probably enable you to add the names of some, or all of your great-grandparents to your chart!

If you are lucky enough to have some of your grandparents still alive and can question them you'll find them glad to talk of the people they used to know, what they did, what they were skilled in—and you will not only build a good picture of some or all of your great-grandparents (their parents) but also of your great-great-grandparents (their grandparents).

The data which will help and which you want to collect is the same on every person. Of course your own chart will be the most complete because you know the most about yourself. It should be—because it is your own life you wish to check.

Start with the physical traits, health, physique, eye and hair-color. Note any possible unusual traits, such as webbed toes. And be sure to note illnesses, heart-conditions, the *cause* of death, the length of life in each individual.

Make Research Thorough

Make your notes as complete as possible on the occupations and activities, either professional or amateur, of every person. Pay special attention to special skills. Skill with the hands, speed in running, skill in painting (whether it be lamp-shades or greeting cards makes no difference" drawing, mechanics. Remember that a blacksmith, an inventor and an engineer all show the same basic interests.

And that wheelwright, carpenter and shipbuilder all spring from the same basic interests.

Develop this list of informative notes as elaborately as you can. You will discover many little items concerning traits to be noted as you jot down information about yourself, and about the others. An ear for music, a sense of rhythm, a deep desire to go fishing or hunting.

The desire to live in the woods away from people—or to travel and explore strange places.

And when you have listed as many traits as you can concerning every person on your chart, check off the traits you have in common with each of those other people. You are due for a thrilling surprise. For the first time in your life you will feel a surge of confidence in yourself such as you never knew

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—because you will suddenly get a glimpse behind the mystery we call life.

You will begin to see who you are and will have a guide (not perfect but a beginning) to explain your inmost longings and desires.

You will see who, among your ancestors, you are actually related to!

And you will be able to assure yourself that you can succeed in what you wish to accomplish because the skill existed before you were born. You will know what skills you have inherited in your unconscious mind's thought-centers—and will know that these thought-centers can help you to do what you want to do!

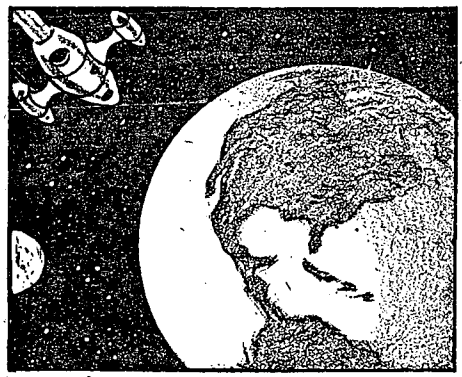
Thrilling Vision

You will see it, because you will find that your important trait-desires come from only two or three persons in your immediate background, just as your physical traits do. And if you check over your notes and information in the light of this discovery you will learn that the tie is closer than it appeared at first.

This is basic preparation for the future that is coming—the new world that is speeding into our everyday living with supersonic speeds. It is necessary for the body to be adapted and prepared for the shocks to which it will be subjected when it experiences the new-age inventions.

Fortunately the change did not come instantly from horse and buggy to jet plane! The body has had three full generations in which to become accustomed to gradually increasing speeds. Trains increased their speeds as the years passed until, half a century ago the "Empire State Express" became the *fastest* train in the world, traveling more than sixty miles per hour! Automobiles duplicated the feat of trains. Then airplanes appeared!

In the next issue the steps by which the body has kept pace with increasing speeds will be outlined. They build a startling ladder of physical and mental development since the time George Washington commanded the continental armies! But the most fascinating fact is the certain knowledge that the speed of your own individual development is, to a great extent, up to you.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

F. ORLIN TREMAINE

Continues This Fascinating Series With

MAN AND THE FUTURE

Another Provocative Special Feature!

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There was light in the faces of those who came and testified

THE MAN

By RAY BRADBURY

CAPTAIN HART stood in the door of the rocket. "Why don't they come?" he said.

"Who knows?" said Martin, his lieutenant. "Do I know, captain?"

"What kind of a place is this, anyway!" The captain lighted a cigar. He tossed the match out into the glittering meadow. The grass started to burn.

Martin moved to stamp it out with his boot.

"No," ordered Captain Hart. "Let it burn. Maybe they'll come see what's happening then, the ignorant fools."

"He walked among us and was fine and good . . . ."

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Martin shrugged and withdrew his foot from the spreading fire.

Captain Hart examined his watch. "An hour ago we landed here, and does the welcoming committee rush out with a brass band to shake our hands? No, indeed! Here we ride millions of miles through space and the fine citizens of some silly town on some unknown planet ignore us!" He snorted, tapping his watch. "Well, I'll just give them five more minutes, and then—"

"And then what?" asked Martin, ever so politely watching the captain's jowls shake.

"We'll fly over their double-despicable city again and scare seven bells out of them." His voice grew quieter. "Do you think, Martin, maybe they didn't see us land?"

"They saw us. They looked up as we flew over."

"Then, why aren't they running across the meadow? Are they hiding, are they yellow?"

Martin shook his head. "No. Take these binoculars, sir. See for yourself. Everybody's walking around. They're not frightened. They—well, they just don't seem to care."

Captain Hart placed the binoculars to his tired eyes. Martin looked up and had time to observe the lines and the grooves of irritation, tiredness, nervousness there. Hart looked a million years old, he never slept, he ate little, drove himself on, on. Now, his mouth moved, aged and drear, but sharp, under the held binoculars:

"Really, Martin, I don't know why we bother. We build rockets, we go to all the trouble of crossing space, searching for them, and this is what we get. Neglect. Look at those idiots wander about in there. Don't they realize how big this is. The first space flight to touch their provincial land. How many times does that happen? Are they that blase?"

Martin didn't know.

CAPTAIN HART gave him back the binoculars wearily. "Why do we do it, Martin? This space travel I mean. Always on the go. Always searching. Our insides always tight, never any rest."

"Maybe we're looking for peace and rest. Certainly there's none on Earth," said Martin.

"No, there's not, is there." Captain Hart was thoughtful, the fire damped down. "Not since Darwin, eh? Not since everything went by the board, everything we used to believe in, eh? Divine power and all that. And so you think maybe that's why we're going out to the stars, eh, Martin? Looking for our lost souls, is that it? Trying to get away from our evil planet to a good one?"

"Perhaps, sir. Certainly we're looking for something."

Captain Hart cleared his throat and tightened back into sharpness. "Well, right now, we're looking for the Mayor of that city there. Run in, tell them who we are, the first rocket expedition to Planet Forty-Three in Star System Three. Captain Hart sends his salutations and desires to meet the Mayor. On the double!"

"Yes, sir." Martin walked slowly across the meadow.

"Hurry!" snapped the captain.

"Yes, sir!" Martin trotted away. Then he walked again, smiling to himself.

The captain had smoked two cigars before Martin returned.

Martin stopped and looked up into the door of the rocket, swaying, seemingly unable to focus his eyes or think.

"Well?" snapped Hart. "What happened? Are they coming to welcome us?"

"No." Martin had to lean dizzily against the ship.

"Why not?"

"It's not important," said Martin. "Give me a cigarette, please, captain." His fingers groped blindly for the rising pack for he was looking at the golden city and blinking. He lighted one and smoked quietly for a long time.

"Say something!" exploded the captain. "Aren't they interested in our rocket?"

Martin said, "What? Oh. The rocket?" He inspected his cigarette. "No, they're not interested. Seems we came at an inopportune time."

"Inopportune time!"

Martin was patient. "Captain, listen. Something big happened yesterday in that city. It's so big, so important that we're second-rate—second fiddle. I've *got* to sit down." He lost his balance and sat heavily, gasping for air.

The captain chewed his cigar angrily. "What happened?"

Martin lifted his head, smoke from the burning cigarette in his fingers, blowing in the wind. "Sir, yesterday, in that city, a remarkable man appeared, good, intelligent, compassionate, and infinitely wise!"

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The captain glared at his lieutenant. "What's that to do with us?"

"It's hard to explain. But he was a man for whom they'd waited a long time—a million years maybe. And yesterday he walked into their city. That's why today, sir, our rocket landing means nothing."

The captain sat down violently. "Who was it? Not Ashley? He didn't arrive in his rocket before us and steal my glory? Did he?" He seized Martin's arm. His face was pale and dismayed.

"Not Ashley, sir."

"Then it was Burton! I knew it. Burton stole in ahead of us and ruined my landing! You can't trust anyone any more."

"Not Burton, either, sir," said Martin, quietly.

The captain was incredulous. "There were only three rockets. We were in the lead. This man who got here ahead of us? What was his name!"

"He didn't have a name. He doesn't need one. It would be different on every planet, sir."

THE CAPTAIN stared at his lieutenant with hard, cynical eyes.

"Well, what did he do that was so wonderful that nobody even looks at our ship?"

"For one thing," said Martin, steadily, "he healed the sick and comforted the poor. He fought hypocrisy and dirty politics and sat among the people, talking, through the day."

"Is that so wonderful?"

"Yes, captain."

"I don't get this." The captain confronted Martin, peered into his face and eyes. "You been drinking, eh?" He was suspicious. He backed away. "I don't understand."

Martin looked at the city. "Captain, if you don't understand, there's no way of telling you."

The captain followed his gaze. The city was quiet and beautiful and a great peace lay over it. The captain stepped forward, taking his cigar from his lips. He squinted first at Martin, then at the golden spires of the buildings.

"You don't mean—you *can't* mean— That man you're talking about couldn't be—?"

Martin nodded. "That's what I mean, sir."

The captain stood silently, not moving. He drew himself up.

"I don't believe it," he said, at last.

At high noon, Captain Hart walked briskly into the city, accompanied by Lieutenant Martin and an assistant who was carrying some electrical equipment. Every once in awhile he laughed loudly, put his hands on his hips and shook his head, eyes shut.

The mayor of the town confronted him. Martin set up a tripod, screwed onto it a box, and switched on the batteries.

"Are you the mayor?" The captain jabbed a finger out.

"I am," said the Mayor.

The delicate apparatus stood between them, controlled and adjusted by Martin and the assistant. Instantaneous translations from one language were made by the box. The words sounded crisply on the mild air of the city.

"About this occurrence yesterday," said the captain. "It occurred?"

"It did."

"You have witnesses?"

"We have."

"May we talk to them?"

"Talk to any of us," said the mayor. "We are all witnesses."

Aside to Martin, the captain said, "Mass hallucination." To the mayor, "What did this man, this stranger look like?"

"That would be hard to say," said the mayor, smiling a little.

"Why would it?"

"Opinions might differ slightly."

"I'd like your opinion, sir, anyway," said the captain. "Record this," he snapped to Martin over his shoulder. The lieutenant pressed the button of a hand recorder.

"Well," said the mayor of the city. "He was a very gentle and kind man. He was of a great and knowing intelligence."

"Yes, yes, I know, I know." The captain waved his fingers. "Generalizations. I want something specific. What did he look like?"

"I don't believe that is important," replied the mayor.

"It's very important," said the captain sternly. "I want a description of this fellow. If I can't get it from you, I'll get it from others." To Martin, "I'm sure it must have been Burton, pulling one of his practical jokes."

Martin would not look him in the face. Martin was coldly silent.

The captain snapped his fiingers. "There was something or other—a healing?"

"Many healings," said the mayor.

"May I see one?"

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"You may," said the mayor. "My son." He nodded at a small boy who stepped forward. "He was afflicted with a withered arm. Now, look upon it."

AT THIS, the captain laughed tolerantly. "Yes, yes. This isn't even circumstantial evidence, you know. I didn't see the boy's withered arm. I see only his arm whole and well. That's no proof. What proof have you that the boy's arm was withered yesterday and today is well?"

"My word is my proof," said the mayor, simply.

"My dear man!" cried the Captain. "You don't expect me to go on hearsay do you? Oh, no!"

"I'm sorry," said the mayor, looking upon the captain with what appeared to be curiosity and pity.

"Do you have any pictures of the boy before today?" asked the captain.

After a moment a large oil portrait was carried forth, showing the son with a withered arm.

"My dear fellow!" The captain waved it away. "Anybody can paint a picture. Paintings lie. I want a photograph of the boy."

There was no photograph. Photography was not a known art in their society.

"Well," sighed the captain, face twitching. "Let me talk to a few other citizens. We're getting nowhere." He pointed at a woman. "You." She hesitated. "Yes, you come here," ordered the captain. "Tell me about this wonderful man you saw yesterday."

Martin flinched at the sarcasm in the words.

The woman looked steadily at the captain. "He walked among us and was very fine and good."

"What color were his eyes?"

"The color of the sun; the color of the sea, the color of a flower, the color of the mountains, the color of the night."

"That'll do." The captain threw up his hands. "See, Martin? Absolutely nothing. Some charlatan wanders through, whispering sweet nothings in their ears and—"

"Please, stop it," said Martin, breaking out.

The captain stepped back. "What?"

"You heard what I said," said Martin. "I like these people. I believe what they say. You're entitled to your opinion, but keep it to yourself, sir."

"You can't talk to me this way," shouted the captain.

"I've had enough of your highhandness," replied Martin. "Leave these people alone. They've got something good and decent and you come and foul up the nest and sneer at it. Well, I've talked to them, too. I've gone through the city and seen their faces, and they've got something you'll never have. A little simple faith, and they'll move mountains with it. You, you're boiled because someone stole your act, got here ahead and made you unimportant!"

"I'll give you five seconds to finish" remarked the captain. "I understand. You've been under a strain, Martin. Months of traveling in space, nostalgia, loneliness. And now, with this thing happening. I sympathize Martin. I overlook your petty insubordination."

"I don't overlook your petty tyranny," replied Martin. "I'm stepping out. I'm staying here."

"You can't do that!"

"Can't I? Try and stop me. This is what I came looking for. I didn't know it, but this is it. This is for me. Take your filth somewhere else and foul up other nests with your doubt and your—scientific method!" He looked swiftly about. "These people have had an experience, and you can't seem to get it through your head that it's really happened and we were lucky enough to almost arrive in time to be in on it.

"People on Earth have talked about this man for twenty centuries after he walked through the old world. We've all wanted to see him and hear him, and never had the chance. And now, today, we just missed seeing him by a few hours!"

CAPTAIN HART looked at Martin's cheeks. "You're crying like a baby. Stop it."

"I don't care."

"Well, I do. In front of these natives we're to keep up a front. You're overwrought. As I said, I forgive you."

"I don't want your forgiveness."

"You idiot. Can't you see this is one of Burton's tricks, to fool these people, to bilk them, to establish his oil and mineral concerns under a religious guise! You fool, Martin, you absolute fool! You should know Earthmen by now. They'll do anything—blaspheme, lie, cheat, steal, kill, to get their ends. Anything is fine if it works; the true Pragmatist, that's Burton, you know him!"

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The captain scoffed heavily. "Come off it, Martin, admit it; this is the sort of scaly thing Burton might carry off, polish up these citizens and pluck them when they're ripe."

"No," said Martin, thinking of it.

The captain put his hand up. "That's Burton. That's him. That's his dirt, that's his criminal way. I have to admire the old dragon. Flaming in here in a blaze and a halo and a soft word and a loving touch, with a medicated salve here and a healing ray there. That's Burton all right!"

"No." Martin's voice was dazed. He covered his eyes. "No, I won't believe it."

"You don't want to believe." Captain Hart hammered at him mercilessly. He saw he had Martin staggering, the structure of his belief crumbling away, and he destroyed it blow on blow.

"Admit it, now, admit it! It's just the thing Burton would do. Stop daydreaming, Martin. Wake up! It's morning. This is a real world and we're real, dirty people, Burton is the dirtiest of us all!"

Martin turned away, his shoulders moving. His face was wet, his breath came and went in huge sobs.

"There, there, Martin," said Hart, mechanically patting the man's back. "I understand. Quite a shock for you. I know. A rotten shame, and all that. That Burton is a rascal. You go take it easy. Let me handle this."

Martin walked off slowly toward the rocket.

Captain Hart watched him go. Then, taking a deep breath, he turned to the woman he had been questioning. "Well. Tell me some more about this man. As you were saying, madam?" He pointed swiftly at the woman.

Later the officers of the rocket-ship ate supper on card tables outside. The captain correlated his data to a silent Martin who sat red-eyed and brooding over his meal.

"Interviewed three dozen people, all of them full of the same milk and hogwash," said the captain. "It's Burton's work all right, I'm positive. He'll be spilling back in here tomorrow or next week to consolidate his miracles and beat us out in our contracts. I think I'll stick on and spoil it for him."

Martin glanced up sullenly. "I'll kill him," he said.

"Now, now, Martin! There, there, boy."

"I'll kill him, so help me, I will." Martin twisted his hands against his chest.

"We'll put an anchor on his wagon. You have to admit he's clever. Unethical but clever."

"He's dirty." Martin spat it out.

"You must promise not to do anything violent." Captain Hart checked his figures. "According to this, there were thirty miracles of healing performed, a blind man restored to vision, a leper cured. Oh, Burton's efficient, give him that."

A gong sounded. A moment later a man ran up. "Captain, sir. A report! Burton's ship is coming down. Also, the Ashley ship, sir!"

"See!" Captain Hart beat the table. "Here come the jackals to the harvest! They can't wait to feed. Wait 'til I confront them. I'll make them cut me in on this feast, I will!"

Martin looked sick. He stared at his captain with revulsion.

"Business, my dear boy, business," said the captain.

Everybody looked up. Two rockets swung down out of the sky.

When the rackets landed they almost crashed.

"What's wrong with those fools?" cried the captain, jumping up. The men ran across the meadowlands to the steaming ships. The captain arrived. The airlock door popped open on Burton's ship.

A man fell out into their arms.

"What's wrong?" cried Captain Hart.

THE MAN lay on the ground. They bent over him and he was burned, badly burned. His body was covered with wounds and scars and tissue that was inflamed and smoking. He looked up out of puffed eyes and his thick tongue moved in his split lips.

"What happened?" demanded the captain, kneeling down, shaking the man's arm.

"Sir, sir," whispered the dying man. "Forty-eight hours ago, back in Space Sector Seventy-Nine-DFS, off Planet One in this system, our ship, and Ashley's ship, ran into a cosmic storm, sir." Liquid ran gray from the man's nostrils. Blood trickled from his mouth. "Wiped out. All crew. Burton dead. Ashley died an hour ago. Only three survivals."

"Listen to me!" shouted Hart, bending over the bleeding man. "You didn't come to this planet before this very hour?"

Silence.

"Answer me!" cried Hart.

The dying man said, "No. Storm. Bur-

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ton dead two days ago. This first landing on any world in six months."

"Are you sure?" screamed Hart, shaking violently, gripping the man in his hands. "Are you sure?"

"Sure, sure," mouthed the dying man.

"Burton died two days ago? You're positive?"

"Yes, yes," whispered the man. A line of gray gushed from one eye. The head fell forward. The man was dead.

The captain kneeled beside the silent body. The captain's face twitched, the muscles jerking nervously around the old eyes, the lips twisting involuntarily. The other members of the crew stood in back of him looking down. Martin waited. The captain asked to be helped to his feet, finally, and this was done. They stood looking at the city. "That means—"

"That means?" said Martin.

"We're the only ones who've been here," whispered Captain Hart. "And, that man—"

"What about that man, captain?" asked Martin.

The captain's face twitched senselessly. He looked very old indeed, and gray. His eyes were glazed. He moved forward in the dry grass.

"Come along, Martin, come along. Hold me up, for my sake, hold me, I'm afraid I'll fall. And hurry. We can't waste time—"

They moved, stumbling, toward the city, in the long dry grass, in the blowing wind.

Several hours later they were sitting in the mayor's auditorium. A thousand people had come and talked and gone. The captain had remained seated, his face haggard, listening, listening. There was so much light in the faces of those who came and testified and talked, he could not bear to see them. And all the while his hands traveled, on his knees, together, on his belt, jerking and quivering.

When it was over, Captain Hart turned to the mayor and with strange eyes said:

"But you must know where he went?"

"He didn't say where he was going," replied the mayor.

"To one of the other nearby worlds?" demanded the captain.

"I don't know."

"You must know."

"Do you see him?" asked the mayor, indicating the crowd.

The captain looked. "No."

"Then he is probably gone," said the mayor.

"Probably, probably!" cried the captain, weakly. "I've made a horrible mistake, and I want to see him now. Why, it just came to me, this is a most unusual thing in history. To be in on something like this. Why, the chances are one in billions we'd arrive at one certain planet among billions of planets the day after he came! You must know where he's gone!"

"Each finds him in his own way," replied the mayor gently.

"You're hiding him." The captain's face grew slowly ugly. Some of the old hardness returned in stages. He began to stand up.

"No," said the mayor.

"You know where he is, then?" The captain's fingers twitched at the leather holster on his right side.

"I couldn't tell you where he is, exactly," said the mayor.

"I advise you to start talking," and the captain took out a small steel gun.

"There's no way," said the mayor, "to tell you anything."

"Liar!"

AN EXPRESSION of pity came into the mayor's face as he looked at Hart. "You're very tired," he said. "You've traveled a long way and you belong to a tired people who've been without faith a long time and you want to believe so much now that you're interfering with yourself. You'll only make it harder if you kill. You'll never find him that way."

"Where'd he go? He told you, you know. Come on, tell me!" The captain waved the gun.

The mayor shook his head.

"Tell me! Tell me!"

The gun cracked once, twice. The mayor fell, his side wounded.

Martin leaped forward. "Captain!"

The gun flashed at Martin. "Don't interfere."

On the floor, holding his wounded side, the mayor looked up. "Put down your gun. You're hurting yourself. You've never believed, and now that you believe, you hurt people because of it."

"I don't need you," said Hart, standing over him. "If I missed him by one day here, I'll go on to another world. And another and another. I'll miss him by half a day on the next planet, maybe, and a quarter of a day on the third planet, and two hours on the next, and an hour on the next, and half

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an hour on the next, and a minute on the next. But after that, one day, I'll catch up with him! Do you hear that?" He was shouting now, leaning wearily over the man on the floor. He staggered with exhaustion. "Come along, Martin." He let the gun hang in his hand.

"No," said Martain. "I'm staying here."

"You're a fool. Stay if you like. But I'm going on, with the others, as far as I can go."

The mayor looked up at Martin. "I'll be all right. Leave me. Others will tend my wounds."

"I'll be back," said Martain. "I'll walk as far as the rocket."

They walked with vicious speed through the city. One could see with what effort the captain struggled to show all the old iron, keep himself going. When he reached the rocket he slapped the side of it with a trembling hand. He holstered his gun. He looked at Martin.

"Well, Martin?"

Martin looked at him with pity. "Well, Captain?"

The captain's eyes were on the sky. "Sure you won't—come with—with me, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Ha, it'll be a great adventure. I know I'll find him."

"You are set on it now, aren't you, sir?" asked Martin.

The captain's face quivered and his eyes closed. "Yes."

"There's one thing I'd like to know."

"What?"

"Sir, when you find him—if you find him—" asked Martin "—what will you ask of him?"

"Why—" The captain faltered, opening his eyes. His hands clenched and unclenched. He puzzled a moment and then broke into a strange smile. "Why, I'll ask him for a little—peace and quiet." He touched the rocket. "It's been a long time, a long long time since—since I relaxed."

"Did you ever just try, captain?"

"I don't understand," said Hart.

"Never mind. So long, captain."

"Good-by, Mr. Martin."

The crew stood by the port. Out of their number, only three were going on with Hart. Seven others were remaining behind, they said, with Martin.

Captain Hart surveyed them and uttered his verdict, "Fools!"

He, last of all, climbed into the airlock, gave them all a brisk salute, laughed sharply. The door slammed.

The rocket lifted into the sky on a pillar of fire.

Martin watched it go far away and vanish.

At the meadow's edge, the mayor, supported by several men, beckoned.

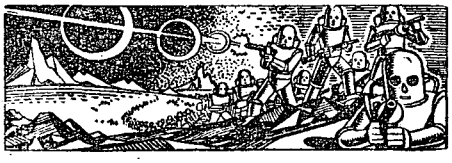
"He's gone," said Martin, walking up.

"Yes, poor man, he's gone," said the mayor. "And he'll go on, planet after planet, seeking and seeking, and always and always he will be an hour late, or a half hour late, or ten minutes, late, or a minute late. And finally he will miss out by only a few seconds. And when he has visited three hundred worlds and he is seventy or eighty years old he will miss out by only a fraction of a second, and then a smaller fraction of a second. And he will go on and on, thinking to find that very thing which he left behind here, on this planet, in this city—"

"You mean?" said Martin, looking steadily at the mayor.

The mayor put out his hand. "Was there ever any doubt of it?" He beckoned to the others and turned. "Come. Come along now. We mustn't keep him waiting."

They walked into the city.



COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE CONCRETE MIXER

A Novelet of Martians on Earth

By RAY BRADBURY

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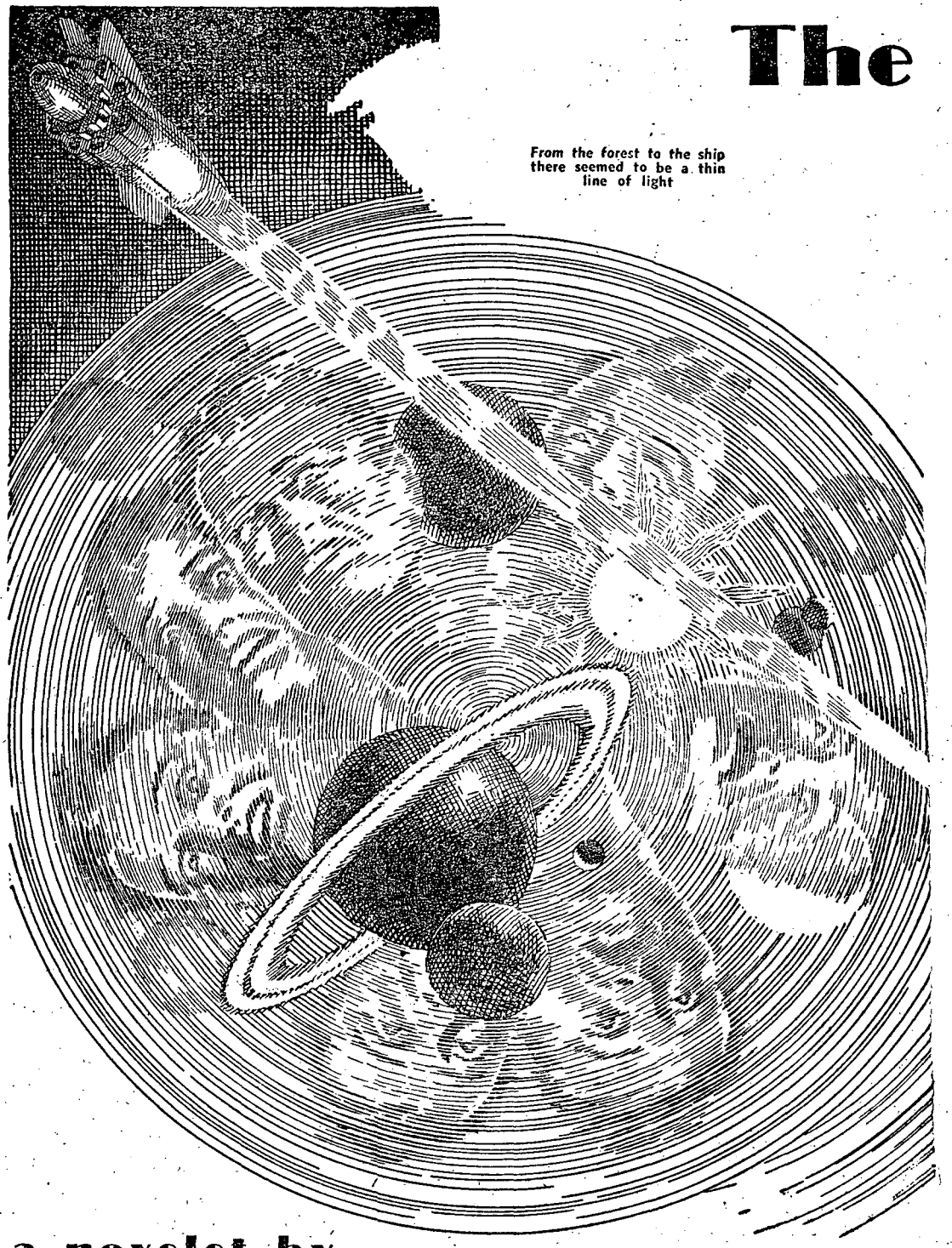
The



From the forest to the ship there seemed to be a thin line of light

a novelet by

JAMES BLISH and DAMON KNIGHT

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Weakness of Rvog

When the alien came from nowhere the world was faced by doom—unless a chink in his armor could be found!

CHAPTER I

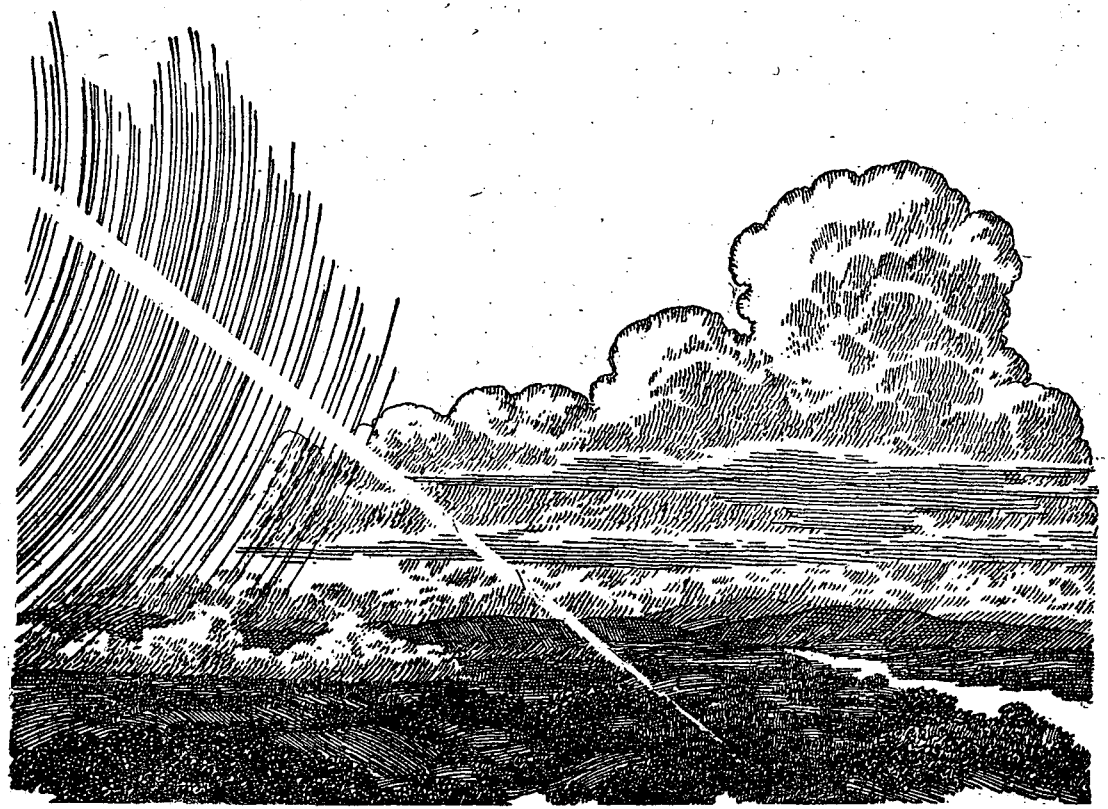
The Coming of Rvog

THE vague sea of faces at the far side of the field began to move restlessly as the space-vessel arrowed down. Suddenly they scattered, washing away from the central cleared space like spilled quicksilver.

Bergsen was uncomfortably aware that the terrorized flight was going on in the crowd behind his back too, but he stood his ground. The plummeting ship swelled and the air outside it boiled invisibly away. The sky screamed like a metallic banshee. The ship decelerated with logarithmic smoothness, at a rate that would have crushed a man to bloody custard. Bergsen watched it, waiting.

It swept in with deceptive casualness. At the last minute the curious keel raised and glided sharply down. Concrete fountained away like water as it struck. The shining hull stopped suddenly at the end of its trench.

The people on the other side were approaching again but a good deal more slowly than they had left. A thin black line scored a circle on the side of the ship and there



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was a sharp hiss as a space-lock swung open. Bergsen grinned tightly as the wave of advancing humans slowed. Port Commissioner Holm's voice spoke suddenly over Bergsen's shoulder.

"Did you see that landing?" Holm was demanding unnecessarily. "Fifty G's at least or I'm a slime-beetle! *That's* no Titanian craft!"

"I know it," Bergsen said quietly through white lips. "There was a vacuum inside—and look what's coming out!"

Commissioner Holm's gasp was one with the simultaneous gasps and shrieks of five hundred human beings around the alien ship. His unbelieving gaze must have been duplicated tens of thousands of times by those watching the vision broadcasts. That first sight of RVOG was—well, something to remember.

Women fainted and were trampled in the press of humanity as RVOG strode forward. Struggling against the pressure of the hundreds on the outskirts of the crowd who wanted to get closer, the horrified inner rim forced its way back, shrinking away from the visitor.

RVOG stopped.

Bergsen advanced slowly and the welcoming committee followed, leaving behind two minor officials who had collapsed. Holm's hard young face was drained of color beneath the deep space-bronze and Bergsen knew he didn't look much better. After them came the Director of the city of Chicago, several district spokesmen and a terrified male vision star.

The Commissioner and his aide stopped before the alien. Weakly, fighting down his nausea, Bergsen made gestures, arms raised to indicate weaponlessness—pointing from himself to the creature, shaking hands with himself.

Holm joined in, moving back slowly and inviting the alien to follow him, pointing to the Terminal building at the edge of the field.

The thing followed their motions with no expression that could be read by human eyes and did not move to follow Holm.

"It's no good," said Bergsen, shrugging his big shoulders. "How can we expect it to understand human sign language? It's made differently. Its mind must work differently. Why, the thing isn't even semi-human, Charlie—how can you communicate with a being that hasn't got a mouth?"

Colors flickered across RVOG's face. "Well," said Holm nervously. "He doesn't look much like the Titanian Expedition, I'll admit. Maybe Davis and Erdsenov can get into communication with him—only how are we going to get him to go into the Terminal?"

"Get behind him," Bergsen suggested, "and push."

"YES, we're making some progress," Davis said, "but it's slow work. After three months we've established nothing but the names of some two hundred material objects—tables, chairs, men, houses, books." He leaned against the work table with a sigh which fluffed out his moustaches like brown butterflies.

Erdsenov put down his notebook and joined him. He and Erdsenov were an excellent team, Bergsen thought, despite the comic-opera way the spare Russian towered over plump little Davis. The Swedish Commonwealth had no reason to love Russians and the Americans still found the Cooperative State rather hard to take. The two scientists drew strength from each other.

"I can see," Bergsen said, "that there'd be trouble getting a completely non-human being to understand abstractions—things like 'think' or 'eat.'"

"And things like 'be', 'make', 'come', 'do', 'begin'," Erdsenov murmured. Bergsen could see that he was taking a craftsman's pleasure in the very difficulty of the problem. Erdsenov loved languages for their own sakes—he spoke fifteen, including three Martian dialects he had been the first to crack—and RVOG's color-symbology obviously fascinated him.

"Essential words, you understand. But it is not easy. There is no point of contact between our thought-pattern and his."

Bergsen looked at the being from space, standing motionless, as was its wont, on the other side of the table. RVOG was bifurcate.

He had a head and eyes in the head. But there the resemblance to man ended.

His squat, heavy body was encased in a natural covering harder and tougher than the strongest metal. The short legs, curiously articulated, sprang machine-like from the flattened bottom of the torso. The arms, only slightly less thick, sprouted similarly from the sides, a little below the "shoulders."

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There was no neck. The domed, helmet-like head rose straight from the torso, without a break. There were three round, heavily-shuttered eyes, two before and one behind. Two whorled horny ears were set almost flush with the surface of the head. And below the front pair of eyes, where nose and mouth should have been, was a roughly circular area where the flashing colors of RVOG's speech came and went.

The rest of him was as shiny and black as anthracite. His hands were six-fingered—three fingers and three thumbs. For feet he had oval extremities which were neither feet nor hooves. When he had first entered the room the floor had sagged alarmingly beneath him but, oddly, this no longer happened.

But far more frightening than his appearance was his motionlessness. The creature radiated power—power beyond all human imagining, held in check until—

Until when?

The eyes looked expressionlessly back at Bergsen. Colors glowed, displacing each other on the horribly blank face. "What's he saying?" Bergsen asked.

"Red, green, orange, violet," said Erdsenov. "That's his name, or at any rate the combination he uses to symbolize himself. Yellow, orange, blue. That's 'Book.' Green, yellow, green, yellow—this one is going to be 'spaceship.' Umhm. He deliberately sends slowly so we can catch it—that's one complex idea we got across, anyhow. Red, blue, orange, red—that corresponds to 'you,' plural, his name for us. Probably means 'morons,' I suppose. Violet, violet, green . . ."

When it was done Bergsen scratched his blond head and looked uncomprehendingly at the scientists. " 'I, book, spaceship, you, more-than-twelve, machines, city?' " he said. "What do you make of that?"

"Nothing," said Davis. "What sense *can* you make out of anything without verbs?" He turned wearily back to RVOG, taking down the color-symbols as they began again.

Erdsenov put a hand on Davis' shoulder. "Patience," he said. "We have time still before us and there is a solution somewhere. Maybe in months, maybe in years, we will find it. What luck with our friend's spaceship, Capt. Bergsen?"

Bergsen grinned wryly. "A perfect blank as you must have guessed. All the machinery is in the hull, which blunts diamonds and turns torches. We've taken X-rays but—have you seen those plates? Like a child's scribbling. Evidently all the circuits are stenciled and the stuff they're stenciled on is perfectly insulating and paper-thin. The layers must run to hundreds to the centimeter. Hopeless!"

"And the astronomers?"

"Losing their minds. Everything depends on you two, I'm afraid. We thought he was the lost Titanian Expedition, as you know—but when we found what the truth was, we extended the Earth-Jupiter arc he had seemed to be following. Beyond Jupiter it swerves away from the ecliptic. Goes into an area where the nearest star is two hundred light-years away! Even with the mythical faster-than-light drive what kind of a mortal being could make a flight like that?"

"What kind of a 'mortal' being *is* this?" asked Erdsenov softly. "One completely alien to us in every way. We cannot speculate as yet as to what he is or what he can do—nor why he came here. The reactions and capabilities of the Martians are at least partially understood. But this? And when I realize that there may be thousands, millions more like him within range of us—perhaps already on their way here—or waiting for a word from him . . ."

He paused for a moment, ignoring Davis' startled glance. "Do you know, sometimes I think it would be better for us if we were to destroy him," the Russian whispered. "Destroy him at once—lest he destroy us!"

Bergsen looked at RVOG, and remembered the spaceship's fantastically resistant hull.

"*Can* he be destroyed?" he said.

THE COLORS flickered, passing in rapid succession. Bergsen watched intently while Davis tapped the seven keys of his simple machine, flashing a reply. A pause and then RVOG spoke again. Blue-green-yellow-green-red . . . orange-blue-green-green-violet . . . red-yellow-red.

The television camera hummed softly, recording it all. An announcer's voice murmured in the background. Erdsenov grinned excitedly at Bergsen, then at the assembled scientists.

"We are getting somewhere at last," he said. "It all hinged on the concept of *'not.'* 'Not-man,' meaning inhuman, 'more-than-twelve man not-you,' meaning the Martians.

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Oh, it was crucial. Once we managed to establish that the verbs were easier. We have little as yet, you understand, but perhaps enough. We are questioning him now."

RVOG sat motionless in the seat that had been made for him after the model of the one in his ship. The colors flowed, then ceased.

Davis frowned at his notes. Erdsenov joined him and they held a muttered consultation. The 'vision camera tracked them avidly. Davis stood up and cleared his throat.

"We first showed him star-maps, and tried to make him understand the relationship they bore to our own sun. Then we asked him to point to his own star of origin. His answer was, 'RVOG star not-map.' We have taken this to mean that his star does not show on our charts—that, therefore, it cannot be seen with our best telescopes."

There was a murmur of surprise from the audience at the other side of the room.

"We next asked him," Davis resumed, "what he ate—that is, where he obtained the energy which we get from oxygen and food. His answer was, 'star light.' This may mean solar radiations or it may refer to the cosmic rays—probably the former, since as far as we know the cosmic rays do not originate in the stars."

He turned to the scientists in the audience. "At this point we have decided to ask for questions from other sciences, since some sort of communication appeared to be established. Would any of you gentlemen care to interrogate him?"

Several would. Davis put each question to RVOG, translating as well as he could into the abbreviated color-language.

"How long did your trip take?"

"Not word," RVOG flickered stolidly. "Long."

"How many of you are there?"

"More-than-twelve."

"All on one planet?"

"No."

There was a brief pause; then Bergsen called, "Davis, ask him if his people are all like himself."

"I can't," Davis said. "That's too complicated."

"Ask him how many RVOG's there are, that's simple enough."

Davis tapped at the keys. RVOG said, "More-than-twelve."

Davis said, "You see?"

"Can his ship go faster than light?" a Patrol Admiral put in impatiently.

"Yes, no," said RVOG. "Light more fast; ship go around light."

"We asked him that before and got the same answer," Davis said. "It seems to indicate some sort of hyperspatial drive. Any more questions?"

"Ask him," Holm suggested, "if there's anything *he* wants."

Davis punched the keys deftly, and Bergsen watched him with some curiosity. The concept of "want" was a delicate one. How could they be sure RVOG agreed with them on its meaning?

But the keys had barely stopped clicking when RVOG rose from the bucket-seat, his multiple eye-hoods blinking in the nearest approach to a display of emotion he had yet shown. The scene at the field repeated itself in miniature. Those who were leaving crowded back into the room. Those in front shrank back.

Davis took the reply down and stared at it. Then he began thumbing through notebooks. He argued briefly, heatedly, with the Russian, both men talking under their breaths. At last he straightened and faced the restive crowd.

"He says, *'I want—death!'* "

CHAPTER II

Ways and Means

THERE WERE seven men in the room —Bergsen, Holm, Davis and Erdsenov; Rosswaenge and Fawcett from Tech Institute and one other—Poul Sorenson, the Director of the North Americas for the Cooperative State. Davis sulked in his chair while Erdsenov addressed the others.

"My colleague and I have made signal advances in communication with the alien creature, Red-green-orange-violet, since its startling declaration of three days ago. Now—" He paused, and his dark eyes passed over them earnestly. "I feel that the time has come when we must decide a question of greater importance than any of those which science wishes RVOG to answer.

"We must decide, gentlemen—and I say this in all earnestness—whether Dr. Davis and I shall continue to work out a base of communication between ourselves and this

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monster or whether we shall bend all our efforts at once toward granting his request —to find a means of destroying him!"

The Director frowned. "What's the need for this decision, Dr. Erdsenov?"

"I will tell you," Erdsenov said, "and then I will ask for opinions from the others gathered here. The decision will then be yours and I will abide by it. In the past three days, we have learned these things—RVOG wishes us to kill him. That is his sole purpose in coming here. He is unable to kill himself. He is immortal and, he thinks, invulnerable.

"His race is not immortal but his class is. He has tried to tell us why this is so but his explanations are gibberish to us. All we are able to fathom is that he was *made* immortal by his race and set free to roam the universe. We have guessed that he is a criminal, but since it was our first guess it is probably wrong.

"And if you wonder, gentlemen, why we guessed that the immortality might be a punishment I can only tell you that RVOG wants it ended.

"Finally we have learned that our world is not the first he has visited in his search for death. He has encountered many planets in his wanderings—more-than-twelve, if you please, gentlemen—peopled by intelligent beings. All, he says, were 'evil.' All failed to give him what he seeks.

"If we had to do with a humanoid, I should say that he by now must be becoming desperate. Since we have not I say only that we cannot afford to take chances with a creature of his powers.

"Gentlemen, listen to me! We cannot predict, we can only guess. It is too early—but precisely for that reason we *must* act now. What little any man knows about RVOG, I, Boris Erdsenov, know. And I tell you that the consequences to the human race, should we decide wrongly, may be unthinkable!"

Fawcett stirred restlessly in his chair. "Just what *are* you afraid of, Erdsenov?" he asked bluntly.

"I am afraid," Erdsenov said wryly, "that if we fail to destroy RVOG he will destroy us."

The split-second's silence was broken simultaneously by three men. Rosswaenge and Fawcett turned pros and cons upon each other and Davis put a sharp annoyed question to Erdsenov. Poul Sorenson grinned ruefully and tapped for order.

"Dr. Davis," he said, "will you give us your opinions next?"

Davis stood up nervously, fumbling with the pince-nez which he still wore in defiance of need and fashion. "My opinion is simply this," he began. "What Boris has said is perfectly true. There *is* great danger in RVOG. If a creature like that should choose to regard us as enemies it could do great damage—even if it did no more than kick things apart.

"We would be in the position of men who had to ruin a burning building with water in order to keep the fire from spreading—and of course his ship must mount weapons.

"Very well. There exists great danger in atomic research—the danger of blowing up a continent, such as nearly happened during the study of the Bethé principle in the Twentieth Century—remember the La Plata Blast? Nevertheless, science must take the chance or backslide—no static point is possible.

"We have in RVOG an opportunity for research which is unparalleled in the history of the race—an interstellar visitor, carrying with him a tremendous mass of new data—a new biology, a new physics, a new chemistry—a new psychology and sociology to boot.

"As I see it, it is our plain duty as scientists and as human beings to continue to study RVOG, whatever the danger. To destroy him, before we have so much as scratched the surface of the knowledge he represents, would be insane."

He sat down, meeting Erdsenov's sad gaze determinedly.

The Director frowned, pulling at his chin. "Perhaps so. Still, you will not maintain that the La Plata Blast was a desirable thing, I trust. Professor Fawcett? Dean Rosswaenge? Have you anything to add?"

ROSSWAENGE said, "I'd like to bring up a point or two about the immortality angle. We ran a series of tests on RVOG recently at Erdsenov's request. The creature's hide is beyond our analysis and I am tempted to say that there is no such substance.

"It is stronger than herculeum, harder than diamond, a perfect insulator, chemically one hundred percent inert, and with an elasticity, longitudinal *and* cross-sectional, which seems to vary according to the stress placed upon it.

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"All this would seem to bear out the thing's statement that he cannot be harmed. The day after we ran the first tests we got Erdsenov's permission to try really drastic measures—RVOG himself was in accord, of course.

"First we tried a cutting torch, which behaved exactly as the hull of RVOG's ship behaves. The substance raises itself obediently to the temperature of its temporary environment — but *its other properties, strength, hardness, and so on, do not alter.*

"The big cyclotron at Tech makes him fluoresce a little, nothing more, and he actually seemed to be using some of the beam for energy. Then we tried a semi-portable machine-rifle, which didn't even knock him down at point blank range. Explosive shells endangered us more than they did him. We were just about to try a naval rifle when Dr. Davis entered his objection.

"Professor Fawcett thinks the thing couldn't stand against a fission bomb but I'm not so sure. In any case we are both agreed that, if this creature wanted to tear down the Earth with his hands or take it over or do anything else he chose, we couldn't stop him with anything that wouldn't hurt the planet as much as he might. Is that everything, Harry?"

"Covers it, I think," Fawcett replied.

"Commissioner Holm? Captain Bergsen?" the Director said.

Holm nodded to Bergsen, who arose immediately, feeling a little sheepish in such high-octane company. "We really have little to contribute to this meeting. It's just that we were among the first to see RVOG when he landed, half a year ago.

"But since you ask for our opinion—we've talked it over, and we agree with what Dean Rosswaenge just said. RVOG is probably more powerful than any safe agency we could pit against him. We'd best do what he wants.

"It's perfectly possible to destroy him. Indestructibility is just a word. Whether or not *we* are capable of destroying him—that is, whether or not he's indestructible *for us* —is another matter. I'll have to defer to Dr. Erdsenov's opinion on that."

He sat down. "That is good semantics, Bergsen," Erdsenov said approvingly. "Let us continue in this vein. RVOG is possibly destructible by physical means but this approach is obviously out of the question for us —the plain fact is that *physically* he is stronger than our entire civilization. We cannot destroy him by force without using measures which will destroy the planet as well.

"What remains? Only one possibility—we must do what has hitherto seemed impossible. We must find out precisely *why* RVOG wishes to be destroyed, for the nature of the problem includes its solution. We have this much in our favor—it is axiomatic that a suicidal mentality is a diseased mentality. There lies RVOG's weak spot and our only hope for the continued existence."

"I disagree," Rosswaenge said heatedly. "We have barely scratched the surface of physical methods. Suppose we construct an underground chamber of duralith, lined with herculeum, seal RVOG inside and detonate a sizable mass of radioactives. If any safe force known to our science is capable of piercing his armor, that will do it. His eyes, too, look comparatively vulnerable; a vibratory drill might pierce to his brain if it is in his head. We can then try to collapse the molecular structure—"

"This is madness!" Davis shouted, upsetting his chair. His face was flushed with rage. "Both of you propose to destroy at one stroke the greatest opportunity for the advancement of our culture that has appeared since space travel!" He pointed a shaking finger at Erdsenov. "Boris, you are no longer my friend. You are a traitor to the science you serve!"

Erdsenov's face whitened. "That's enough!" he said, advancing upon his smaller colleague. "You have gone too far. *You* call *me* a traitor! You would murder your fellow men to satisfy your technical curiosity!" He relapsed into Russian, stuttering in his fury. Poul Sorenson was pounding the table futilely. Chairs scraped back. Fawcett raised his voice angrily. Bergsen grabbed Erdsenov's arm.

The meeting broke up in chaos.

CHAPTER III

Crush-out

DAVIS GREETED them dispiritedly in the little room where he sat with RVOG. Bergsen noticed, with a sense of shock, that he looked years older than when

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they had seen him last. His hair was grayer around the temples and there were haggard lines in his face.

"How is it with him?" Holm said.

Davis sighed, half turning to glance at RVOG's quiescent color-organ. "We haven't been making very much progress since Boris and I split up. We do have the sorter—" He pointed to the screen above the receptor focused on RVOG's face.

"It analyzes his color-combinations and flashes the corresponding English words on the screen. It speeds up the work but it's limited to the words we already know. I almost wish Boris were back—he was a genius at getting new words out of this animated rainbow."

He looked at them stubbornly. "I'm still certain that I'm right and he's wrong, understand. But without him RVOG just keeps going over the same ground, as if he'd reached the limit of communication with his present vocabulary. It's a sort of paradigm —'You must kill me. Weakness is fear. Fear is evil.' It's a hell of a time for him to be lapsing into philosophy!"

There was a cold chuckle from the door and Erdsenov came in. The rangy scientist was wearing flying togs. "I know what he means," he said.

Davis turned. His face relaxed, then went hard again. "You do? Keeping it a secret, I suppose?"

Erdsenov shrugged. "I have made no secret of it. I have a fairly good idea now of RVOG's basic psychology. When I have it completely worked out I will destroy him, Davis. Take warning."

"I won't allow you near him."

"The Director may change his mind. Have you seen the video reports? They are getting worse. The public is cracking. Kill-RVOG movements, Save-RVOG movements, a deluge of crackpot methods for destroying him, housewives imagining mother RVOG's and three baby RVOG's going through their backyards—a new mass hysteria. We have had nothing like it since the first interplanetary colonization set off the last cycle of fear a century ago."

"We were ripe for it," Davis said. His face was suddenly more drawn than ever. "This damned Swede world-state—begging your pardon, Bergsen, but I don't know. I've too much responsibility to be a good judge any more. RVOG's waiting for something. And I'm afraid to know what it is."

"You already know," Erdsenov said mercilessly.

Davis did not appear to hear him. In a voice that was all the more horrible because it was calm, he said, "For the first time in my life I feel that I have encountered a problem that must be solved and that I cannot solve. I'm going to pieces under it. I think the world is going to pieces with me."

He buried his face in his hands. Bergsen stared at Holm, the ground suddenly unstable beneath his feet.

Then the color-organ in RVOG's face came to life. Hues washed over it in quick succession. The sorter hummed with satisfaction, and words appeared on the screen, one after another.

WHY

"Look!" Holm choked, shaking Davis' shoulder.

WILL

Davis looked and made a small hopeless sound. "It's come," he said.

NOT
YOU
KILL
ME

The colors stopped.

There was a feverish glow in Davis' cheeks. "We cannot," he mouthed as he tapped the keys of his transmitter.

The colors began again.

YOU
HAVE
NOT
TRIED

"Time!" Davis cried out. "You must give us time," his fingers said.

THERE
IS
NO
MORE
TIME

And for the first time in months RVOG stirred. He rose from his chair and walked slowly around the table, past Davis' half-fainting figure. His curious feet once more made the floorboards groan.

Erdsenov stood aside with a grim mockery of courtesy. Holm grabbed automatically for RVOG as he passed but Bergsen snatched him back. Imperturbably RVOG went out the open door.

"You came close to death then," Bergsen whispered, tightening his grip.

Holm was trembling. "I know it," he said hoarsely. He shook Bergsen off and rushed

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to the window. Bergsen thought a moment, then went into the next room and tuned in the vision broadcast from the control tower. The seeing would be a good deal better than it would be from the low window. Erdsenov followed him.

The juggernaut was making his way unerringly across the spaceport grounds to the hangar wherein was stored the ship in which he had come to this planet. The guard must have heard the steady ponderous tread and recognized it, for he fled before RVOG came into his sight.

RVOG let him go. He walked through the locked door of the hangar as if it were butter, leaving a haze of boiling metal, and disappeared.

"Stop your ears!" Erdsenov said sharply.

The squat ovoid hit the hangar's roof a hundred feet up, making at least four miles per second. The impact burst the crystals into molecules, the molecules into free atoms of iron, chromium, manganese, molybdenum, cobalt, tungsten. The incredible heat drove them in and out of combination with the air, with each other, with anything that came to hand.

Bergsen's fingers were halfway to his ears when the north side of Chicago Terminal went out in a blast that shattered plastic windows all the way to the old drainage canal. The Terminal Building on the south side of the field tottered but, miraculously, did not collapse. RVOG's ship was out of sight before the girders had stopped singing.

DIRECTLY OVER Bergsen's head a decorative fixture swung crazily and the air was fogged with smoke and dust. For a while he could see nothing. He was dead and in hell. Then the oval of the video screen came dimly into sight and he got shakily to his feet. Some invisible person muttered angrily in Russian. Bergsen staggered into the next room.

A tall shelf of apparatus had collapsed upon Davis and blood was running into his eyes. Holm had been less fortunate. Bergsen averted his eyes and shook Davis.

The scientist rolled over painfully, and rubble slid off him. "Bergsen?"

"Yes. Lie still a minute. Your forehead got struck by a splinter."

The Patrolman soaked a handkerchief at the sink and swabbed Davis' forehead. Davis tried to sit up. "Thanks. I hear Boris next door. Better see if Holm—"

"Dead," Bergsen said. "He was in front of the window and the concussion burst open his abdomen. It's rather messy—you'd better go directly out. Get some soluweb for that cut."

Davis struggled to his feet, swaying. "You Swedes are a cold lot. All right, I was stupid but maybe I've learned something. Let's get to a 'visor and order your squadrons up. Get me a berth in a ship. Maybe RVOG was—Anyhow, get the fleet!"

Bergsen considered the matter. With Holm dead he had no immediate superior in Chicago and it would probably be as sensible to take Davis along as to leave him behind. After all, the man did know a good deal about the enemy.

"At your service," he said finally. "You can ride with me." He went back to the transmitter, tight-lipped and feeling somehow exultant. This was open conflict—something a man could cope with!

Erdsenov was already at the plate, talking to the Tower. He turned as Bergsen came in. "They say the explosion has already put a third of the fleet into the air, and the rest are being called as quickly as possible. Rockford has reported the ship but Dubuque cannot be raised; there is heavy radioactivity in the pressure area coming up from there."

"Thanks. Want to come along with us?"

The Russian shook his head. "I have my own flier outside, if it has not been damaged. I must get to my field station at once—I have only a few hours to work at most before it will be too late."

"Work at what?" Bergsen demanded but Erdsenov was already out the door. In the other room Davis was rescuing some notes from the scramble on the ruined work table.

"Ready, Doc?"

"Set," Davis said, pocketing the notes.

"Go, then."

On the half-ruined field there was already a ragged semblance of organization. The Patrol was not invincible but it was efficient. Three bulldozers were blading debris away from the runways which had survived the blast and bandaged men in tattered uniforms were trotting purposefully toward the one undamaged hangar. The control tower still stood upright on one twisted leg, a testament to the tensile strength of herculeum. Its loudspeakers boomed.

A private flier coughed at the edge of the field and taxied away. Davis watched it go. His expression was very strained and some-

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how, hurt.

"This way," Bergsen said. "The *Loki* was berthed in Number Two. It's—"

HE BROKE off, interrupted by a sudden hissing thunder. Overhead a glittering shape rocketed, heading skyward; two more followed it, then a group of four, jockeying for formation. Far above them a phalanx of silvery dots ranked against the blueness.

"Is that the fleet?"

"Of course not," Bergsen said, chuckling. "That's probably just the Dayton Squadron—nothing larger than a class C. The nearest battleplane is in New Stockholm. Singapore is putting a monitor in the air but I doubt that GHQ will risk using it. There's the *Loki*."

The ship was small, not much bigger than RVOG's, but Bergsen loved it. Anyhow, size hadn't much meaning now. Davis clambered through the port hurriedly and Bergsen led him up the ramp to the bridge.

"Now what? Must we wait for orders or something?"

"We've got standing orders for things of this kind—get in the air as soon as possible and join any flight that happens to be going by. Do you think the Patrol fights on regulations? I'm waiting for my crew, that's all."

Two green lights came on in front of him. "There's an engineer and a stinger reporting themselves aboard—probably neither of them is mine but their own ships are disabled."

Davis fidgeted nervously. It was obvious that the weight of guilt was almost more than he could bear—that he would be glad to be doing anything so long as it was action. He couldn't be expected to appreciate the thousands of actions represented by the winking green lights. Bergsen turned on the G. C. Speaker.

". . . north of Yellowstone. Does not appear to be putting on speed. Still no report from Iowa City, Lincoln or Denver. No report from the Salt Lake Squadron since sighting the enemy. Battleplane *Fenris* down over Spencer, but acting commander believes hit scored. Survivor Salt Lake Squadron reports Squadron trying to reform, enemy doubling back north-northeast, two probable hits. Monitor *Ginnangu* reported over Korea. No report from . . ."

Another light went on. "That's good enough," Bergsen said. He felt strangely calm. He tripped the "Stand By" warning. "Hold on to your bridgework, Doc."

The take-off knocked Davis down.

"Sorry," Bergsen said. He let up the acceleration pressure a little. Davis lay for a moment, choking for breath. Then he heaved himself doggedly to a sitting position. In the viewplate a huge cloud swelled, blotted out the sky, swirled directly into their faces. Davis ducked instinctively.

"Doesn't seem to be any company around here," Bergsen said. "If he's going north-northeast he must be pointing for Toronto. Any suggestions, Doc?"

"Suggestions?" Davis panted weakly, climbing into the co-pilot's seat.

"Sure—I'm Holm's successor, you know, so I'm free to act 'in the best interests of the Commonwealth' in emergencies. I can do a vault if you like—take her out of the atmosphere and come down ahead of RVOG—if he sticks to low-level flight."

"Won't that put us ahead of the other ships?"

"No, they'll be raining down on him from all directions. At his present speed he'll hit the coast about the same time the boys from the Moon Squadron do. They mount heavy stuff."

Bergsen watched Davis' puzzling with some contempt. The civilian mind was frequently baffling, particularly when complicated by the delusions of persecution the American minority suffered. Why should the little man care whether there was a mob of ships along with him against RVOG or not? If RVOG became a target for a really heavy bombardment the *Loki* would have to stay on the outskirts and miss all the fun.

"Check me on this," Davis said slowly. "Probably RVOG's ship is as indestructible as he is. But there's a marginal chance that it can be blown out from under him. After all, we hadn't ever considered trying to destroy the ship, so it might be vulnerable."

"Sounds reasonable. A good long fall might imbed him pretty deeply too—enough to get the monitor on the scene before he digs himself out."

"That's the nub of the problem, Bergsen," Davis said. "A fission bomb probably won't do anything more than make him uncomfortable."

Bergsen saw then what he meant. The monitor mounted Bethé weapons—the unimaginable fury of the "Solar Phoenix," the sun's energy source. The Bethé guns had been designed for space combat only. Used

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so close to home they could easily destroy the planet.

"If RVOG is totally immune," Bergsen said, "he'll destroy us just as surely as the Solar Phoenix would—just more slowly, that's all. Maybe I'm a berserker but I'd hit him with the best we had. We might as well go out in one big blaze and take him with us as be torn down by sections and let him go."

"I agree," Davis said in a strained voice. "Let's do a vault."

CHAPTER IV

The Chink in the Armor

THE *Loki* stood on its noisy tail. The air outside began to moan and the sound intensified rapidly. There was nothing to see but the sky and the steadily rising yowl was a very graphic speedometer. The sensation of going faster and faster and then faster again was horribly exciting even to Bergsen. It addled the brains. It was as if one's own voice were screaming in ecstasy.

But there was nothing to see except the Earth in the rear viewplate. The maplike squares of cultivated fields had long since run together and left behind only a mottled something, like camouflage cloth. It began to take on a marked curvature. The sky ahead was indigo, dimming to sable.

And all the time the speaker on the boards clarioned disaster. RVOG was reported over the Sioux City area. The battleplane *Midgard* had rammed RVOG. RVOG reported approaching Minneapolis. At least four Midgard survivors picked up. Sault Ste. Marie reporting something that might have been RVOG. Calling Minneapolis. Calling St. Paul. Calling Minneapolis. Calling . . .

Bergsen shifted the jet balance and the *Loki* began to straighten out. It seemed as if the little ship were still going up as fast as before, but now broadside to the stars. The shriek faded away, leaving their eardrums keening with something too high for sound.

"Down we go, Doc," Bergsen said. "It'll make you sick but you'll have company." He cut off the jets and fired one short burst to lift the ship's tail a little higher than her nose.

The *Loki* reached her peak, skimmed flat and began to drop. The rounded camouflage pattern drifted into view in front of her. The contents of Bergsen's stomach charged up into his frontal sinuses and his blood tried to push the top of his head off. He choked, blinded, dizzy, his eyes streaming. Distantly he could hear Davis retching miserably.

"Just—put it—any old place, Doc. Nobody ever gets used to this." He wiped his eyes and blinked until he could see the screen again. It showed a dull green area, which he guessed to be forest. In its midst there seemed to be a thin line of light, thinner than a thread. Colors were running along it with quicksilver rapidity.

"Rainbow?" he muttered. "Nope, not visible from above. Any idea what that is, Doc?"

Davis swabbed his face with his sleeve and looked. "Rainbow?" he repeated weakly. "What do you mean? I don't see—"

"You're looking too far to the left," Bergsen said, shifting his feet on the treadles. "Right in the center of the plate."

"Oh—yes, I see it. It's—"

"Well?"

"It's just a guess. Can't you go any faster?"

Bergsen felt a faint surge of admiration. "You're a glutton for punishment. I could but you'd be sick again when I braked. I've had years of conditioning, remember."

"I don't care."

Bergsen shrugged and fired the rear jets once. The scene on the screen grew—a green thatching of forest, a narrow, pulsating rainbow striping it—and, after a few moments, a dot of light that swelled into a little silver bug, motionless at the end of the rainbow.

"Is that—our friend?" Bergsen asked softly.

"Yes."

"Stopped?"

"Yes."

Bergsen whistled and felt the sweat spangle his forehead. He began to brake the ship as gently as he could. "Somebody," he said, "has a lot on the ball." He scanned the boards quickly. A scattering of bright-red pips showed on the detector screen. "If whoever it is can hold him a few minutes more the Moon Squadron will be here—they're already tripping my outer screen."

They watched the rainbow in an agony of suspense. It was quite clear now. RVOG's ship was motionless, about three thousand meters above the Canadian woods. From

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among the trees about a mile away a narrow ray slanted over the matted pines, the colors blinking along it in steady, rapid succession. At the end of the ray, RVOG's ship opalesced, waiting.

As Bergsen pulled the *Loki* up a storm of glistening torpedo-shapes plunged past it, warping into a great cartwheel about RVOG. Above him other shapes made a dome and hovered alertly.

"All squadrons hold fire," a new voice roared from the G. C. speaker. "The enemy is evidently pinned down. The *Ginnangu* will be here in ten minutes. Prepare broadside. Fire only if the enemy breaks free."

BERGSEN sighed gustily. It was a relief but it was a shame that it had to be this easy. "That does it," he said. "Whoever developed that tractor ray deserves nine million medals. I don't care *what* his ship is made of. It won't stand up against the monitor."

David shook his head. "He can leave any time he wants to. That's not a tractor ray. There is no such thing."

The Patrolman blasted the ship to a rough stop, sputtering. "Not a tractor? Then why—"

"It's nothing but a specialized photophone—a communicator designed for RVOG's method of speech. I don't *know* who's operating it, but it can't be anybody but Boris."

"Boris? Erdsenov?" Bergsen jerked his gaze back to the viewplate. He watched the procession of colors fascinatedly for a moment. They were almost hypnotic. "He's talking to the beast?"

"Yes. He's promising him death. I hope to God he can deliver!"

The detectors put out a modest yeeping, announcing something of extraordinary size approaching. The sound rubbed Bergsen's nerves raw and he cut it off. "If he can't," he said, trying to control his breathing, "something's coming that can. The *Ginnangu.*" He laughed.

"Do you know your Scandinavian mythology, Doc?" he demanded, his voice taut with incipient hysteria. "Do you know what *Ginnangu* means? The end of the world, that's what! The end of the world!"

On the forward viewplate, the rainbow beam blinked out.

The cartwheel of ships froze instantly. Bergsen stiffened in his chair. If they thought it a tractor beam as he had—

RVOG's gleaming craft had not yet moved. In the middle distance, something clumsy and monstrous lumbered into the screens, nursed by tiny attendants, propped up on stilts of white fire. The detectors cut in the emergency circuit and screamed their warning.

RVOG waited. Around the monitor the daylight began to bend and darken and writhe. The Solar Phoenix stirred in the cosmic ash and began to open its eyes.

The world exploded.

Bergsen, once more, was sure he was dead, and the sensation was half terror and half pure, undiluted annoyance. He hoped it was final this time.

For long years he wheeled through the dust of dead suns and worlds, sick, helpless, aching, even a little mad. Then the feeling of turning over and over slowed gradually and he was alone.

After a while, the voice of Boris Erdsenov said, "I have your death."

Bergsen knew who would speak next, but he did not want to hear it. When it came, it was worse than any voice heard in all the nightmares of the world.

"You have no death here," it droned. *"You are evil. You have fear here. Fear is evil. But you have no death."*

"We have death. We have always had death as we have always had fear. We have your death."

"You have not my death. None has my death. I have found much evil but no death anywhere."

Boris Erdsenov's voice said, "Die, then."

"How?" The greed in that sound—the *greed!*

There was a long silence. Very distantly, Bergsen saw a haze of light, a foggy circle. His arms and legs began to prickle, and metal projections bound him. He was still in the pilot's seat. The rebirth gave him a powerful sensation, the *déjà vu.* On the screen, RVOG's ship waited, where it had always waited. Beside Bergsen, Davis hung slumped, his nose bleeding, the cut on his forehead reopened. The board was alive with alarm signals.

"How?" the speaker insisted.

"Fear," said Erdsenov. "The king's evil. You can die, Red-green-orange-violet, but you are afraid to die. You are as evil as we. You are afraid. We have given you our evil, RVOG. We have given you our death *the fear of death!"*

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The words meant very little to Bergsen, but some ancestral sense told him how precariously the world hung upon that last speech.

He gripped the arms of the bucket seat and waited.

Then RVOG's ship stirred. It rose gently away from the dull green forest and tilted upward.

It began to accelerate. It swooped into the sky, dimmed, glimmered out.

RVOG was gone.

THE *Loki* had barely touched Earth when the little clearing around the cabin was mobbed. Patrolmen scampered down rope-ladders, Admiral's launches glided in, a news service dropped an ike man and shot off for more. Squirrels perched at the very ends of spruce branches and peered down amazedly, chattering. Erdsenov stood in the door of the cabin and grinned at the confusion, his eyes moving back and forth over the gathering mob.

"He's looking for you," Bergsen growled, giving Davis a terrific blow on the back. "Get over there, you knob-noggin."

Davis stumbled forward. Erdsenov saw him and smiled.

"Boris—Boris, I was wrong—I've murdered a million people!" The American was weeping. Erdsenov embraced him. Bergsen knocked the video man down, grabbed his camera; and began broadcasting interesting pictures of squirrels and clouds.

"You did what you thought right. The thing is gone, that is what counts."

"How in God's name did you do it, Boris?"

An Admiral shouldered through the crowd with Poul Sorenson at his heels. "That's what we all want to know," Sorenson said. "How did you make him leave? And more important—will he come back?"

The cameraman got up, glaring bloody murder, and Bergsen let him have his ike back. "He will not return," said Erdsenov. "He has gone to destroy himself—by falling into the Sun, I think."

There was a stunned, happy silence. They wanted to believe it, they yearned to believe it, but still—

"You're sure?" asked Sorenson. "But how did you make him do it, man?"

Erdsenov permitted himself a weary smile. "I guessed," he said. "You recall how we thought in the beginning that it would be impossible to understand RVOG's psychology? Lacking so much data, it was. The only way I could hope to bring pressure to bear upon him was by making an assumption and then testing it. I did so—I guessed that RVOG was a robot, with a robot's directness and a robot's weakness."

"His invulnerability," said Bergsen, startled. "No natural organism could be built like that."

Erdsenov smiled gently, shaking his gray head.

"You are thinking of the way his outer shell adapted itself automatically to any environment—how it grew harder when hardness was required, acid-resisting when there was acid and so on.

"Yes, that is where I began—but do not make the mistake of thinking that no naturally-evolved creature could have those qualities. I *guessed*—never forget that—but as it happened, I was right. I built logically from that one assumption. I said, if he is a robot, what is he for? The answer was obvious—to test our military strength.

"RVOG was an advance scout for some culture a thousand years ahead of us technically but lamentably retarded ethically. Undoubtedly they had tracers of some sort on him. If we failed to destroy him, then they would know we were too weak to resist invasion. As it is, I think they will give us a wide berth in the future."

"I think I begin to see," said Davis. "Boris, do you mean that—"

Erdsenov nodded. "A robot," he said, "with a robot's simplicity. He had no fear of destruction—he yearned for it—but he hated, and feared because he hated, weakness. Weakness, in his brain, was equated with evil—something to be destroyed. When I showed him that *he himself* was weak—"

THE Russian scientist paused and the only sound was the whirring of the 'vision man's iconoscope.

"He was not indestructible, of course," Erdsenov went on. "If he fell into a sun, for example, or if a Bethé gun were fired at him, he would die—nothing material could withstand that blaze of energy. Since he had not tried this I told him there was only one explanation. He was able to kill himself but *afraid* to try! He was evil.

"Then there was a struggle. Actually, of course, RVOG had a strong implanted resistance to the idea of suicide. But it was

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not, could not be stronger than his fear of weakness and his death-drive combined. He set out to prove me wrong."

There were sounds in the background—men talking in low murmurs into microphones, feet moving, coughs, a sudden, hushed laugh.

Bergsen moved closer, caught Erdsenov's eye. "What about the Bethé guns?" he asked. "I thought they *had* been fired. I was certain for a minute or two that I was dead."

"The other ships fired," Erdsenov told him, "but not the monitor. That is why I cut the so-called tractor beam. I saw the monitor preparing to fire, so I made it appear that I had let RVOG go in order to make the rest of the Fleet fire first. While the gunners on the monitor were recovering their sight, I switched to radio. When you heard my voice and RVOG's answering, you waited."

"I heard that," said Sorenson, "but I didn't believe it. I understand the light transmitter, I think, but what about the radio?"

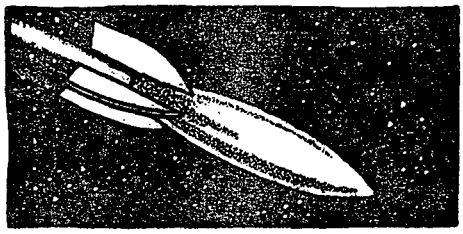
"That, believe it or not, was the most difficult part of the entire problem. I had to have a light-beam which could change frequency directly, not by the slow method of inserting filters or using a bank of lights.

"When I got it I saw that there was no reason why the same impulse patterns might not be broadcast at radio frequencies—or at the other end of the spectrum as varying X-ray pulses. So I called him and he came. I used the light-beam rather than radio to make the Fleet hold its fire until I could finish talking to him. I had no time for explanations. I had to use a trick instead."

Erdsenov gestured widely, letting the grin break over his face. "And so that incredibly-advanced culture from which RVOG came has been defeated. They are stronger than we but we have won the war just the same—by a trick."

Sorenson shook his head. "I can see vaguely how you worked most of this out, but I'm afraid *we* didn't do any of it." He glanced over at the Admiral and smiled crookedly. "If the military doesn't have any objections I certainly think that the Cooperative State will grant you first-class citizenship for this."

"Let me be the first to congratulate you," Bergsen said. "Sorenson's right, you should be a first-class citizen." He grinned mockingly. "Tell me—how do you think you'll like being a Swede, Erdsenov?"



White Sands Report

SINCE several branches of the armed forces, in conjunction with civilian scientific research bodies, began firing high-altitude rockets at White Sands, New Mexico, some three years ago, they have obtained some highly important information about the Earth's outer envelope.

Average height reached by captured and reclaimed German V-2 rockets above Earth is 84 miles with a top altitude of 114 miles.

Thanks to instruments carried aboard the rockets scientists have been able to measure cosmic ray intensity above the atmosphere; capture samples of air thirty-five miles above sea level; produce smoke trails at high altitudes to measure wind velocities; measure air pressure up to forty miles; extend the solar spectrum far into the ultraviolet.

However, according to Dr. James A. Van Allen of Johns Hopkins University, numerous flights with identical instruments must be made at various seasons from several parts of the globe simultaneously before we can consider ourselves to know much about the upper air.

—*Matt Lee.*

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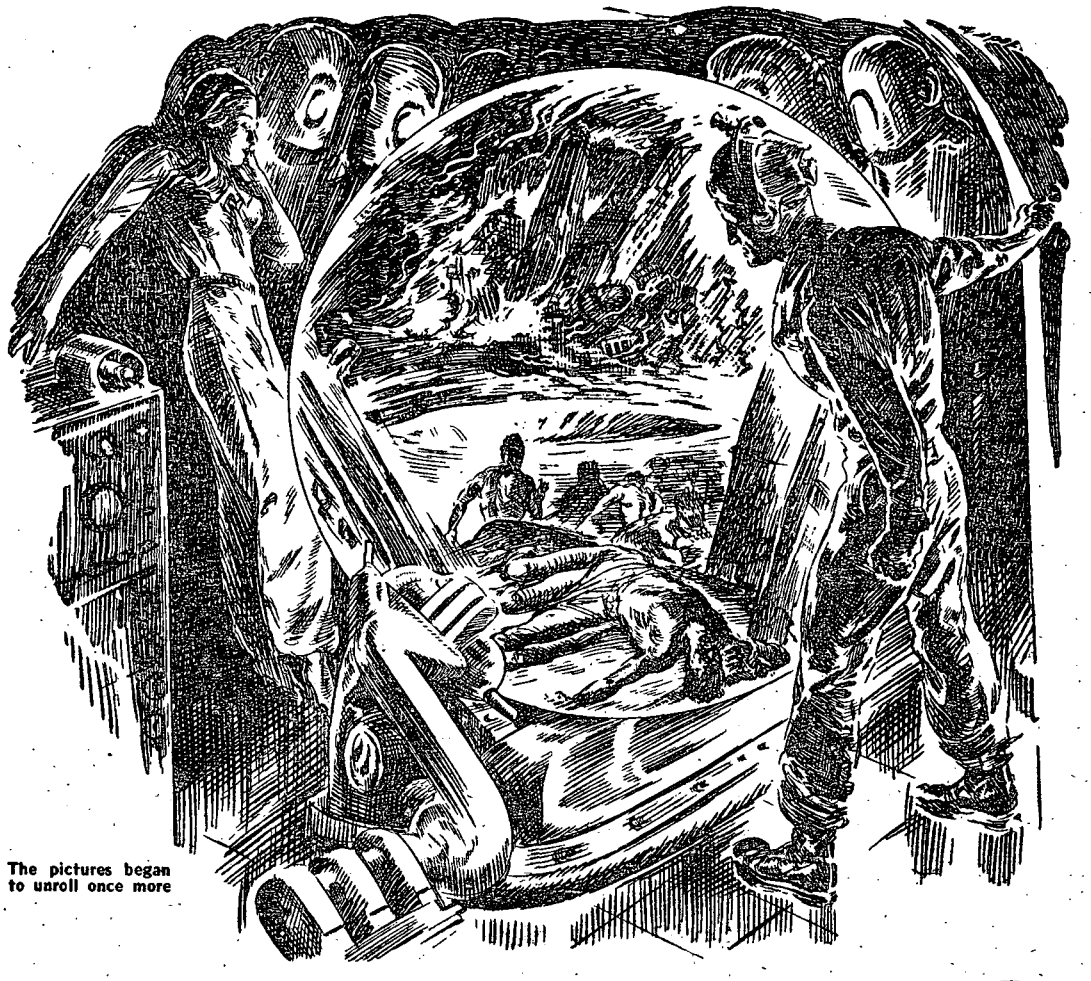

The pictures began to unroll once more

THE CARRIERS

By Sam Merwin, Jr.

Death always ahead of them in space—and lovely Lydia Gray had to find the answer!

DR. GRAY looked around again at the titanic panorama of ruin and felt helpless to check the icy shudder that raced up her spine. She stood amid the nine other members of the exploring party sent out by the big ship in what had, to all appearances, not long ago been the central plaza of an immense city.

The heavy gravity of the alien planet—a half again as large as Earth—seemed to pluck at her vitals despite the rigid swathing of special tape that bound her tightly from hips to diaphragm. But the weight of gravity on Bootes IV was as nothing compared to the dead weight of terror they all felt.

"Have a cigarette, Lydia?" suggested Semanticist Leon Navarro, offering her one. She accepted gratefully and deliberately

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turned her thoughts to the minor irritation of Dr. Navarro's twenty-four-hour five-o'clock shadow.

"It's rough on you, isn't it?" she said inanely.

The semanticist shrugged. "I seem to be along for the ride," he told her. He nodded toward an immense gutted tower of curious nonhuman construction whose fire-blasted frame rose in skeleton silhouette against the too-vivid blue of the sky. "Maybe there will be records—something we can work from—in there."

The men, thoroughly briefed on their appointed tasks, set about them, as did the women of the crew, who were almost as numerous. Dr. Gray considered briefly the bizarre effect which the advent of space travel had had upon the status of her sex. It occurred to her that those grim fosterers of women's rights of years past, Susan Anthony and Carrie Nation, would have reveled in the change.

It had quickly become apparent that women adjusted better and more rapidly than men to the varied conditions of interplanetary exploration. Men—more limited in physical and biological function—were for the most part more brittle. Those who survived were not rugged Vikings of the Nansen-Amundsen type but, for the most part, smaller, softer, more feminine types—like Dr. Navarro or the Japanese astrogator of the expedition, Lieutenant Hyashi Suzuki.

"How're pickings?" Dr. Navarro asked Biologist Marie Duchesne, the small-boned, precisely handsome Swiss, who had led a crew of workers into an oddly shaped metal structure—it looked like half a Roman arch—that seemed to have suffered less than its neighbors in the unnamed disaster that had struck the planet—another instance of the plague that seemed to have swept the galaxy.

"They were vertebrates," said Dr. Duchesne in her odd, neat accents, motioning toward the cloth-covered load carried on a stretcher by two of her aides. "They seem to have had double pelvises and very large brain pans."

Dr. Gray kicked at the smooth metal surface of the huge plaza on which she stood. She knew she should get organized, get into some of the buildings in search of scientific or industrial artifacts that might prove valuable, not only to the archeologists on the big ship but to the advancement of Earth science.

She didn't want to go—she knew too well what would meet her. There would be machines, of course—new and alien and intensely interesting machines. There always were on planets as developed as this one had been. But there would also be skeletons, or at any rate some vestiges of inhabitants whose mysterious and unfailing deadness would be as much mystery as their lives.

"Come on, kids! Let's get it over with."

She motioned with her head toward the young man and two young women who had been designated her assistants on this expedition. She could sense, though none of them voiced their emotions, that they, as much as she, felt reluctance to repeat a performance already grown unpleasantly familiar through repetition. But the job had to be done.

Dr. Gray felt sudden relief as the small auxiliary space ship *Achilles* nestled into its proper place, via tractor beam, in the smooth hull of the big ship, the *Milky Way*, which lay on a smooth stretch of what had been farmland a brief thousand miles from the city. In the two years they had been out from Earth, the big ship had become home.

It looked like an immense globe of silver, a thousand feet in diameter. Actually it was three concentric globes of the toughest, lightest metals human science had yet produced. Its two outer shells were separated by incredibly complex insulation to protect the inmates from the heat and cold and often lethal radiations of space travel. In space, anti-gravity radiations protected its two thick skins from contact with meteors that could puncture them like cheese.

The innermost globe rested in a liquid insulation so frictionless that its thirty decks remained fixed with the mighty engines—the atmosphere drive and the interstellar overdrive and gravity and anti-gravity machines—always at the bottom of the world in which its two thousand inhabitants lived.

Elevators rose and fell smoothly, swiftly and silently in a great central shaft that thrust up from the fuel and engine decks, through the hydroponic gardens, the laboratories, the library, the living, the amusement, the theatrical and gymnasium decks, the dormitories and the arsenal, up to the smaller council quarters just beneath the bridge at the very top of the huge ship.

The auxiliary ships, designed for speedy planetary exploration yet turtle slow compared to the overdrive that made star travel possible, nested stern to stern, like locomo-

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tives in some ancient railroad roundhouse, on one of the larger decks just below the largest central deck.

IN HER own quarters, just below the council deck, Dr. Gray smoked another cigarette as a slim, cool-eyed, dark-blonde girl assistant unwrapped the tape from her body. The task finished, the doctor, grateful once again for the artificial Earth-gravity of the *Milky Way*, showered and donned a simple close-fitting gown of silver that did full justice to her still-young figure, took time with her make-up and allowed the girl to comb out her medium-length brown hair—still, praise Allah, without a hint of gray.

In the many months of existence in the big ship she had come to appreciate the maintentance of as many symbols of femininity as she could muster—such as donning women's clothes in the evening and forgetting her insignia as chief physicist of this incredibly complex mechanical and atomic wonder.

They were having cocktails now in the captain's quarters, two decks above. Sitting in a comfortable armchair, Lydia looked briefly at the familiar faces of her colleagues on Earth's first stellar expedition. Captain Arbuthnot, slim, crisp and British, looking more like a lad up at Oxford than the most brilliant and seasoned young space pilot in the System, grinned at her and made some remark about the fit of her gown—he called it a frock.

"You needn't be gallant, Cyril," Lydia drawled. "You know you've seen this rag at least twenty-five times in the past two years."

Arbuthnot, unembarrassed, murmured something inconsequential over the rim of his glass. Then his eyes strayed to Leon Navarro, whose flushed face indicated that he had grabbed at least a couple of quick ones in his cabin before joining the rest of them. Navarro had been hitting the bottle hard of late.

"How about you, Lydia?" said Arbuthnot, his face serious now. "Find anything sensational this trip? I gather it's pretty much the same story."

"The answers are, 'I don't know yet' and, 'Yes,'" Lydia told him honestly. "These Bootes Four people had a highly developed form of atomic power, maybe even mesonic. Their approach was different, of course. I look forward to some good swotting when we take off again."

"*If* we take off again," said Dr. Navarro gloomily. "We can't hope to escape this horrible thing forever. Something is loose ahead of us—"

"That will be about enough of that," said Captain Arbuthnot quietly but with the authority, so unexpected but so effective, that lurked beneath his carefree exterior.

Navarro regarded him sullenly for a moment, then kept his peace.

"Another martini, *s'il vous plaît?*" said Dr. Duchesne in her trim, precise accents. A steward hurried foward from the bar table to comply.

There was no need for discussion—the topic was too-old a one. It was as old as man's first visit to Venus, thirty-three years before. Mars and the Moon, of course, had long since been dead and little was expected of them. But Venus, beneath her layer of clouds, had seemed more promising.

The first Earthmen to reach her soggy surface had sent back excited reports. There was life on Venus, beyond question—plant life. There was evidence of animal life of sorts. Skeletons were found, caches of broken and long-dead eggs—nothing dried up on Venus. Life on Venus was just around the corner.

But the corner was never turned. There had been life on Venus and fairly recent life. But no more. Something, some agency whose power transcended the understanding of human science, mighty as it was, had wiped all animate life from the little planet more completely than a Biblical plague.

Jupiter, of course, had been a different matter. Thanks to its poisonous atmosphere and surface instability there had, in all probability, never been life of any sort recognized by man. And the outer planets—Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto—had of course been simply barren wastes of frozen matter.

Ultimately human beings, carefully insulated against the fierce heat of the too-near sun, landed on Mercury. And here, as on Venus, they found evidences of organic life along with a rich and primitive hypertropical vegetation. There had been water creatures of sorts—remnants of their structural markings were found in many places, like the traces jellyfish leave on rocks in the sun. But all of them, whatever they may have been, were dead when man arrived on Mercury.

There had been comment naturally. Man had been disappointed in one of his most cherished aims—the discovery of life on

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globes other than his own. But man went on to new goals once the planets were conquered—namely, passage to the stars.

THE RESULT was the *Milky Way*. Into it went all the vast snowballing lore of human scientific wisdom—the fantastic overdrive, the self-perpetuating machinery with its ability to synthesize everything a human could conceive of, from food to air to new sorts of games of chance cooked up by the scientists aboard in lighter moments for the amusement of themselves and the crew.

It was probable, Dr. Gray reflected, that new and better ships were already somewhere on their trail, their long trail from Earth. Some new method of astrogation was needed, a more easily governable overdrive. As it was, the *Milky Way* could reach its pinpoint destinations in the vast voids of space only by a basically cumbersome combination of processes that cried for improvement.

First, of course, the incredibly powerful radio impulses—a far cry from the primitive radar with which humanity had first contacted the Moon back in 1946—were projected to the star-sun decided upon as an objective. A beam was fixed by spectroscopic means and needed distances and velocities were obtained.

Then the overdrive was turned on after the huge globular ship was clear of its planet of departure—rockets were still used for close-in flying. When the overdrive was stopped and an insane universe returned to something approaching normal, rocket flight was again employed while a "safe" planet was selected as a system base and the rocket-powered smaller ships sent out for scouting purposes. Thus it had been in the Proxima Centauri System, now in Bootes.

And everywhere it had been the same ghastly story—desolation, holocaust, death of all animate creatures. What had been puzzling and merely disappointing in Solar System exploration had become grotesque and frightening and inexplicable here. All of them felt it in Captain Arbuthnot's quarters, as it was felt by every crewman and laboratory assistant and cook and mechanic aboard the vast ship.

"These—creatures we found today," said Dr. Duchesne in her perfectly articulated English, "they offer some amusing possibilities. Those double pelvises. Really, they seem to have been a race of Siamese twins."

"It didn't help them any—being double," said Dr. Navarro thickly. He looked from one to the other of them, his black eyes unnaturally bright. "We walk in the footsteps of some unthinkable calamity—some suprahuman agency that wipes out all life apart from Earth just before we are able to reach it."

"Don't be fantastic," said Lydia, but she too felt the strangeness of it. It was almost as if some power wished to prevent them from finding any life but that of Earth. She told herself it was she who was being absurd. How much more economical it would be to destroy the *Milky Way* than a whole series of planets.

"I am not being fantastic," protested Dr. Navarro. "Something is very wrong in this universe. Everywhere it is the same. All animate creatures, billions of them, utterly destroyed before they can take even rudimentary precautions. The result? We have all seen it. Death followed by fire, by ruin."

"Very well." Captain Arbuthnot had apparently decided it was time to have the thing out in the open. "Have you any theory to offer, Leon?"

"I have," said Navarro. "It is a plague, a pestilence of some sort whose key has escaped our biologists. It does not destroy plants—heaven knows our botanical bins are full of flourishing growths. But it is moving through space ahead of us and we cannot hope ourselves to escape it forever."

"I believe that all of you knew this trip might be dangerous when you agreed to come aboard," said Captain Arbuthnot. "We must go on."

"I am not afraid," said Navarro, his face reddening. "It is this strange mystery, this inexplicable death, this endless silence, that is troubling me."

"It's troubling all of us, Leon," said Lydia quietly. She hesitated, then when no one took up the burden of the conversation, added, "I think these people we visited today may have had an answer to our overdrive problem."

"You're joking!" Captain Arbuthnot leaned forward, eyes alight.

"No." Lydia shook her head. "It's going to be quite a job to figure out just what they *did* have—unless Leon and his crew can unravel their writing. It looks utterly alien to me, of course. But they had star travel—we found some models in what must have been a museum. They're queer-looking

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things—more like abstractions in solid geometry than ships—but unless my instinct is way off, they had an overdrive of sorts and some sort of control."

"Is there a chance it's adaptable?" the captain asked, his lips compressed with excitement.

Lydia understood how he felt. She herself was aware of what a fully controlled overdrive could mean—putting the *Milky Way* precisely where it was intended it should go; cutting the time of planet exploration, now the longest single element in stellar travel, to virtually nothing at all; enabling her to slip in and out of overdrive as casually as a runabout.

"There's always a chance," she said with a faint smile, and lifted her glass to her lips. She didn't want to spoil the captain's enthusiasm.

EXACTLY thirty days later, Dr. Gray pushed back a wisp of hair from her wide, smooth forehead and looked incredulously at the object before her. It was something like a pair of cones, joined at their apexes, created out of tubing whose spiraling appeared erratic only at first glance. Actually, its variations were fitted to the curve of supraspace.

She lit a cigarette and studied it, comparing it to a somewhat similar shape on the working model she had taken from the museum on Bootes IV, on whose surface the *Milky Way* still rested.

"Maybe—just maybe," she murmured to herself. She laid down her smoke half finished, unable to wait longer.

Adjusting the Bootean design, once its principles were even half understood, to the Terrean engines of the *Milky Way* had been an almost impossible job of what she called "solid paraphrasing."

She attached it to a model of the Earth ship's overdrive, which had been constructed by her assistants. Then, after carefully closing the doors of the metal cabinet in which the working model was contained, she pressed one of a series of buttons on the outside of the cabinet.

Slowly, moments later, a red light above the button began to dim, indicating that the overdrive was beginning to function within its limits as set by the housing of the model. Though small of size, terrific forces were at work. If the device failed, the model overdrive would be invisible within seconds.

Lydia pressed a second button and, at once, a white light showed as the red faded. Quickly she opened an observation port in the cabinet, whose walls supplied their own fluorescent illumination. Through the quartz pane she saw the overdrive. It was still blurred at the edges, but even as she looked it became clearly defined. It had been stopped before reaching maximum.

"How is it?" said Captain Arbuthnot's voice behind her. "I see you couldn't wait." He peered through the window as she stood aside, lifted an eyebrow.

"It works," she said. "Don't ask me if it's feasible. There are certain principles involved that—well, a lot of it's guesswork. But watch!"

She repeated the experiment and he regarded it with something close to incredulity.

"I don't believe it," he told her finally, with a smile. "But it seems to be so. And now—what about it's application? Can *we* use it?"

"I don't see why not," said Lydia. "How about the *Achilles* for a starter? I can rig up one of these interdimensional transformers—I suppose that's as good a way of naming them as there is—in a couple of days. We can run her out to one of the outlying planets—say Bootes Twelve—in just about nothing flat."

"Direction? How are you going to astrogate her?" inquired the captain.

"That's easy," replied Lydia. "She can make a tractor pull on her own beam. We can make her pull back into dimension on automatic reaction two feet above surface level. Let's see—that's a trip of about a billion and a quarter miles at present. We ought to be there seconds after we push the old buzzer."

"If you've done it—" said the captain, shaking his boyish head. "If you really have done it, you can have the universe!"

"These poor devils we've got it from didn't get much out of it," she said quietly. "Perhaps, by getting there first, we may learn something."

"You're planning to go, Lydia?" he asked.

"I'll have to go," she said, nodding. "I'm the only one aboard who can pull things together if this dingus turns into a booby trap. I'll take Navarro with me, if I may."

"Why Navarro?" The captain looked surprised. "He's not much good."

"He's got nothing to do so far," she told

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him. "What stuff he's picked up needs Earth study. He hasn't a prayer of cracking any of those languages out here and he knows it. The action might be good for him, and besides—"

"You have something else in mind?" Arbuthnot asked when her voice faded out.

She looked at him and her eyes were deep, but she shook her head.

"Let me be a woman, Cyril," she said with a smile. "Let me say I want to do something because— Not because of this or that but just because."

The captain was smiling himself when he left her to return to his bridge and give the necessary orders for the preparation of the *Achilles*. The landing craft assigned to the physicists was the only one in the roundhouse dock at the moment. The others were still out exploring the terrain of Bootes IV.

IT WAS Lydia herself, smiling a smile of reassurance at a nervous Dr. Navarro, who pressed the button on the *Achilles*. Leon, she thought, had a right to his jitters. The idea of unleashing the overdrive for such a brief distance of a little over a billion miles was frightening.

"Take it easy, Le—" she began. Then abruptly her smile faded. Already the white light was flashing. In the visicreen before them a vast surface was coming into clear focus, less than a mile beneath them.

The Spaniard, his face white, was profaning under his breath. The planet was still a planet of life. Canals in near-geometric patterns marked the boundaries of cultivated land whose greens and grays and yellows checkerboarded the terrain. Here and there, where the canals intersected, were tiny artificial structures in small clusters or in larger ones. In the middle distance rose the bulbish towers of some utterly alien city.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Dr. Gray in horror as she pressed other buttons with the speed of desperation under control. Her hair was awry from the quick rake of her fingers, and her cigarette dangled unnoticed from her lower lip.

It was a planet of life, yes—but of life in the very process of annihilation. A great plume of multicolored, billowing smoke rose above the city, and smaller plumes rose here and there from some of the more isolated structures below them. Nowhere, even as they drew within a few score feet of the ground, did anything move in an attempt to put out the holocaust.

They came to rest on a broad, paved level expanse whose edged ramps sloped off underground, whose level surface was dotted with ships reminiscent of the model Lydia had found in the museum of the city of Bootes IV. Even as they stepped from the *Achilles* a gush of evil-smelling smoke poured out of one of the ramp entrances, to be followed by the flicker of flame. In their alarm, they had not stopped to check the atmosphere. The obvious similarity of Bootes XII to Bootes IV had been reassurance enough.

"What struck the poor devils?" said one of the crewmen. The half dozen of them, two men and four women, had followed Lydia and Navarro from the auxiliary ship. No one answered the question. They were all dumb with horror.

More than space and air craft covered the area. Alone and in tangled little heaps of horror, the bodies of what must minutes before have been living creatures littered the metal-paved surface around them. They were the twin-pelvised beings of Bootes IV, and they were not pretty to behold.

Their single heads had faces that were almost humanoid, and without exception they wore expressions of agony and horror beyond belief. Even as they stood there, unable to move, the exposed flesh of one of the corpses began to turn visibly black. It was Lydia who snapped out of it first.

"Get stereographs," she commanded. "Quickly!"

Two members of the crew darted back into the *Achilles* for the tridimensional color camera. Lydia gave them curt directions when they had it set up, then walked a little way to study the body of a strange seven-legged beast which lay close to one of the larger figures, as if in nearness it could find protection from the horror which had struck so suddenly and with such terrifying global finality.

"It's here!" shouted Dr. Navarro suddenly. "We've caught up with it!" And then, looking into Lydia's eyes, hysteria seemed to leave him. The thing he had feared most had happened—he and the plague had met. There was nothing more to be done. He ran a hand over his face and achieved an unsteady sort of smile.

"Very well, Lydia," he said, "Let's be about our business."

"That was very brave of you, Leon," said the physicist, when they were out of earshot

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of the others.

Dr. Navarro winced and shook his head.

"I'm not afraid of what I can see," he told her.

Their hands touched briefly and then, a trifle self-consciously, they walked on toward a strange structure, like a half melon resting on its round portion. It seemed to be the chief building of the port. At any rate, it was the largest.

A small fire was raging in its entrance hall but they were easily able to extinguish it before it spread. There were alien bodies everywhere, of course, but they forced themselves to ignore them and go on about their appointed tasks. They had anthropologists with them who would collect the specimens required by Dr. Duchesne for her studies of alien life forms.

It was here, in an egg-shaped room of the bizarre structure, that Dr. Navarro found his Rosetta Stone. Better than a stone, it was a semi-incandescent globe in the center of the room, in which the same set of tridimensional images flashed no matter from what angle it was viewed. The faintest of whines accompanied the moving images. Dr. Navarro got very busy with his portable equipment.

"It checks," he whispered, a half hour later. "Most of it is supersonic but it checks with the material we found on Bootes Four. The pauses fit the breaks in the ideographs. We can use the automatic phonoscanner on it when we get back to the ship."

But Lydia was not listening. Her eyes were fixed upon the scenes which were being unrolled before her. She supposed the device was something like those used in the theaters back on Earth. Its ability to project at any angle without distortion was superior to that of the projectors of Earth. Its colors and images were just about as sharp, once the watcher grew used to the globe effect.

But for once, its technical features did not interest Lydia. For as she looked on she realized that, beyond doubt, she was seeing some sort of visibroadcast of what was happening around them right now, or had happened shortly before. Suddenly there was a faint click and the globe went blank.

"Oh, no!" she cried, and her distress was echoed by Navarro.

But then, after the briefest of pauses, the pictures began to unroll once more, with a tridimensional clarity that seemed to remove them from the imagery of a projector.

She saw herself looking at an alien city that was yet strangely familiar. She gave a little cry and clutched Leon's arm, glanced at him briefly to meet his nod. He too had recognized the scene. It was, almost beyond question, the great city on Bootes IV which they had explored a scant Earth month earlier.

But it was the city with a difference. The mighty towers were not mere skeletons, nor were the inhabitants. The structures were clothed with some sort of shimmering surface of many colors and the beings, for all of their strange double structure, moved busily about their affairs. It was a pleasant world.

ABRUPTLY, this scene came to an end —almost as did the world it depicted. The next shots, while excellent, were evidently taken from afar, perhaps by some telescopic arrangement. They showed Bootes IV in its death agonies—a mass of flames, explosions and death, much like the planet upon which Lydia and Navarro and the crew of the *Achilles* were now resting.

"It's pestilence, all right," said Lydia. "There is no sign of violence. They all die and then their atomic fires, untended, blaze up and consume them."

"Look!" exclaimed Leon, pointing toward the globe with a shaking finger.

"Great heavens!" countered Lydia. "It's *us*!"

They saw the thousand-foot ball of the *Milky Way*, like some shiny child's toy, settle slowly on the distant inner planet, check rockets blasting to bring it gently down.

For a while then the images were less easy to understand, as they concerned affairs on Bootes XII. But it was evident that vast preparations were being made to resist whatever came, to abandon planet at a moment's notice.

And then unmistakable clarity returned. Incredibly, the two scientists found themselves looking at Terra. A pictographic depiction of the Solar System brought them sunlight in the heavens, was before them, its beautiful bluish green shining from reflected sunlight in the heavens, was before them, its continents clearly outlined in their dear, familiar contours.

It seemed to Lydia that the faint sound-effects which accompanied the image grew louder, faintly threatening at this point. Evi-

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dently Navarro noticed it too, for he hurried back to his instruments and lingered over them, making quick adjustments with his long and delicately formed fingers.

The next visualization was of Mars, long dead, then of cloud-wrapped Venus. Some cloud-piercing device stripped her of her covering and a miraculous science that could reach across light years brought them close to the surface, where dead things were shown, dead things and a human settlement, with its space ship, its communications devices, all its complex machinery.

"It's terrifying!" said Leon, his attention once more on the screen. "The creatures seem to have had us spotted all the way."

"Evidently," said Lydia. Her voice was dry, close to cracking, but she did not notice it, nor that Leon regarded her with something akin to alarm.

A deep understanding was being born within her—understanding and a sudden terrible fear. She waited, knowing what the next set of images would portray but hoping against hope, like the silly human creature she was, that they would not come. Her broad forehead was beaded with perspiration.

It came—the system of Proxima Centauri, the planetwide holocausts, the landings of the *Milky Way*, the expeditions of the auxiliary ships. They had the record complete—complete in all the ghastliness which the members of the expedition had not been able or willing to face. Everywhere they went was death and ruin.

"It's funny they didn't stop us, with all this stuff," said Leon, nodding toward the globe and it's remorseless images. "You'd think that—"

"Don't you see?" Lydia almost shouted. "Don't you understand? They couldn't! Whenever they tried to, they were dead!"

She was close to hysteria. In her the dreams of a thousand generations were being consumed—dreams of friendly contact with alien races on alien stars—of combined supracivilizations of the noble road to a starwide commonwealth.

"What do you mean?" Leon countered stupidly.

Outside of his linguistics and semantics, she thought, he wasn't too bright. To her it was bitterly plain.

"What do you mean?" she mimicked, caught herself. "Sorry, Leon. It's too awful! I guess I blew my top for a moment." Her voice was normal. "It isn't very pleasant to find that the plague is—us!"

He stared at her for a moment, uncomprehending, and then understanding grew and horror with it.

"But how?" he asked, his voice rising. "How?"

"We'll find out," she said bitterly. "We of Earth are clever. We caught up with it here. Remember, it's the first time we've actually been able to reach a world on overdrive—thanks to them." She nodded toward the screen. "Before, it's taken *time*."

She laughed without mirth, looking a little sick. "Mars—we must have finished them off long ago. We're deadly, Leon, I tell you. Maybe we transmit our deadliness along the beams we send forth. We got to Venus—Venus died. Can't you see? It's been the same everywhere. It always will be. We carry death!"

"What are you going to do?" he asked, still grappling with the problem. She looked at him, slapped the pocket of her coverall, shrugged wearily.

"Do?" she said. "*Do?*" She laughed again. "Leon, have you got a cigarette?"

★

The Disposal Problem

ONE of the most difficult-to-overcome obstacles currently blocking the road to space travel is the problem of eliminating the waste heat which would result from the 600,000,000,000 degree Centigrade temperature caused by the nuclear fission needed to lift a space vessel clear of the Earth under atomic power.

Until some screening method of disposal is devised, it seems probable that some sort of combustion fuel developed from that used in present-day rockets will be used to get the space-craft out of the atmosphere. In space, of course, the disposal problem will cease to exist.

The question, of course, is—how to get up there? A lot of brilliant people are currently seeking the answer to that one.—*William K. Walters.*

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Stieve Andro, time-travel's ace reporter, and his robot organizer go back to see what made the Mayans vanish—and walk into a real mess!

an Orig Prem novelet

Miss Mapata opened her great dark eyes and looked at the robot

MONSTERS

CHAPTER I

Trouble in Time-Travel

SMULLEN, managing editor of the Time-Travel Section of the Morning Telepaper, was talking straight.

"I'm getting too much heat on account of you and your robot, Orig Prem. There are always complaints. Can't you do anything with the robot? Or can't you do anything with yourself?"

Stieve Andro, ace reporter for the great Solar News Company that, in 2232, served the nine worlds of the system, squirmed uncomfortably.

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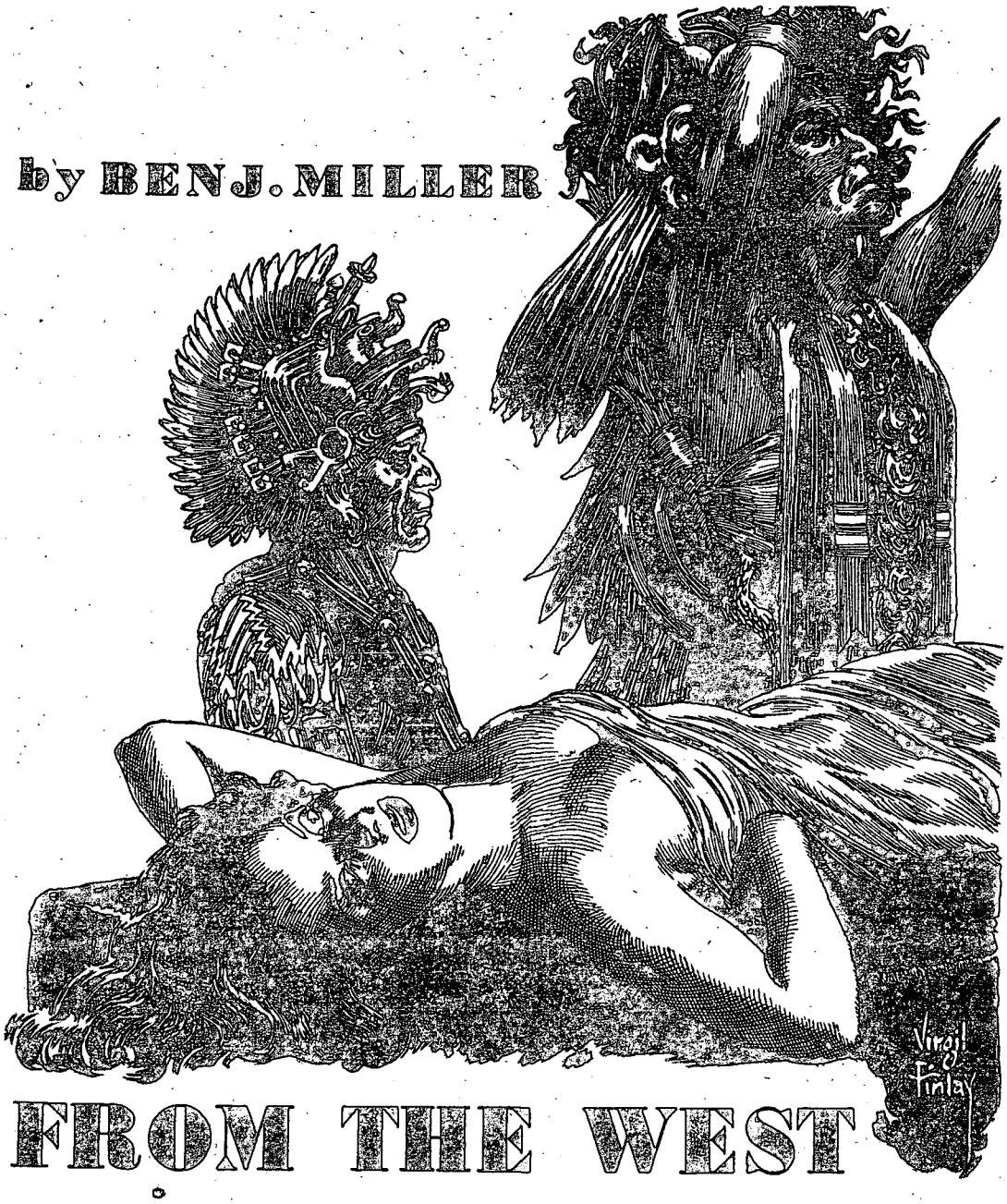
by BENJ. MILLER



FROM THE WEST

When Smullen talked straight he meant business.

"Prem is a busy piece of machinery," Stieve admitted, "but he can't help it. He's built that way. And he never hurts anybody."

Smullen wasn't listening. It was obvious that he was a harassed man.

"And now Saturn is squawking about the Telepaper coverage. That's one of our hardest-to-please planets—and the Saturn contract comes up for renewal next month.

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There are rumors they might not sign. Anyway, Contacts has been putting on plenty of heat."

"Maybe," Stieve said helpfully, "you'd better let us put on a special feature for them. We did Columbus' landing in fourteen hundred ninety-two and then the invention of the wheel in eighteen thousand B. C. How about something in between—something hand-picked for Saturn?"

Smullen sat up straight. "Say, yes. That's an idea. Now what would appeal to them? Saturn is a very old planet, with probably a hundred dead and lost civilizations. They're opening up some dead cities next month. Now what have we got that would fit in?" Suddenly his eyes brightened. "I've got an idea. Know anything about the ancient Mayans?"

"Not yet," said Stieve dryly, "but I have a hunch my ignorance is about to be relieved."

Smullen nodded. "Good hunch. The Mayans are North Americans. They go back nine thousand years to one of the earliest civilized cultures. Very highly developed people—astronomers, mathematicians and all—but the Mayan nation almost disappeared, suddenly and mysteriously. Archaeologists have spent millions of man-hours trying to find out more about them but they haven't had too much luck. Now then, doesn't that fit in with Saturn?"

"It sounds like it."

Smullen reached for the assignment book. "I'll have to see Archaeology for the exact date on this one, I think."

"By the way," Stieve said, trying to be casual, "what is the specific complaint on my robot assistant?"

Smullen looked up, and his eyes were narrow. He had a sheet of typewritten paper. "This is from the Legal Department. A caveman appeared there yesterday and threatened to sue if Solar doesn't get him a contract on Broadway. He said Prem promised him one. It's utterly preposterous. This man isn't an actor. He's a caveman."

Stieve shuddered. The caveman could be none other than Davie Horsemeat from the Stone Age.

"But that isn't what I've got you on the carpet for." Smullen leaned over and looked Stieve straight in the eyes. "What I want to know is, how did that fellow get here? He came from eighteen thousand B. C. He must have come through the time-capsule in direct violation of all regulations. Now who brought him? Did you?"

"I should say not." Stieve was indignant.

"Then Orig Prem must have," Smullen said flatly.

Stieve licked his lips. He was in a corner. The whole deal was typical of Prem. "I'll have a talk with him," Stieve said firmly, and started up.

BUT Smullen stopped him. "There's more to it than that, Stieve." His voice lowered. "They're putting pressure on me to replace all our robots with androids."

Stieve stared. "You mean—scrap Orig Prem?" he asked incredulously.

Smullen was grave. "They're holding Prem up as a chrome-plated example of why androids are better."

Stieve got up and paced once across the floor. "They can't do that," he said. His throat was dry. "Why, Prem is the world's best organizer. Prem has initiative, life. *Androids!*" Stieve snorted.

"Sure, they look like men. You can't tell 'em apart sometimes. But androids are just—androids. Prem is—well, he's an individual. Sure, I know he's a bunch of steel plates and wires and relays and condensers—but he's alive. He's *real.*"

Smullen looked away uncomfortably.

Stieve went on. "They can't make me scrap Prem. Prem and I are like brothers. I'll buy him for myself."

Smullen said gently, "Isn't he a two thousand two hundred nineteen model?"

"Rebuilt," Stieve said defensively.

Smullen smiled sadly. "You can't buy a robot, you know. They're merely leased."

"I'll buy the lease from Solar."

"I'm afraid," Smullen said gently, "the Purchasing Department's mind is pretty well made up."

Stieve stopped short. "You mean they've already decided to scrap Prem?"

Smullen's voice was low. "That's it, I guess."

Stieve gulped. "When?"

Smullen looked at a calendar. "The first," he said. "Five days."

"Why, the dirty—" Stieve floundered. It was too much of a blow. He couldn't think of adequate words to express his contempt. "Who's behind this?" he said finally.

"Andrews, the purchasing agent."

Stieve took a deep breath. "Well," he said, "Mr. Andrews is in for a rugged five

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days." He stalked out determinedly.

The next few hours were miserable. Stieve didn't want to go to his office for fear of running into Orig Prem and he wasn't ready to face Prem yet. He had to figure out an answer of some sort. It did not immediately occur to him that an answer might be pretty difficult.

He didn't go to Traffic because he knew that Medlock, the engineer in charge of time-travel, would be loquacious and he was very much afraid that Medlock would lose no time informing him that Prem had brought Davie Horsemeat up to 2232.

He didn't go to Legal because he had an idea they wouldn't be very hospitable. Finally, about noon, he went to see Murphy, who handled the One Thousand Years Ago Today feature.

Stieve made an elaborate show of being casual. "Keeping you busy?"

"Not very," Murphy said cheerfully. "The Mongols won't invade Europe for ten years now, so I and my android are taking it easy."

Stieve looked around. "Got a new glass desk, haven't you?"

Murphy brightened. "Pretty nifty, isn't it?"

"Certainly is. How'd you ever talk the Purchasing Department into that?"

Murphy tried to look bored. "You have to know the right people."

"By the way, who's Purchasing Agent, anyway?"

Murphy looked at him sharply. "When you say 'by the way' I know you are up to something." He added, "The name is Andrews."

"Do you know anything about him? Any weaknesses?"

Murphy squinted. "Why are you gunning for Andrews?"

Stieve shook his head. "Personal," he said.

"Well, I don't guess he has. He's a pretty cold customer. The only time I've run into him was when I requisitioned a robot and he talked me into an android."

Stieve considered that. It looked very much as if the long-standing rivalry between robots and androids was about to be resolved by Andrews. Who was Andrews, anyway, that he had to take on such decisions as this?

MURPHY yawned and stretched. "I'll buy your lunch."

Stieve exhaled a long breath. "Okay," he said absently.

They went down to the fortieth floor dining room and got a table where Murphy could watch for movie stars. Stieve morosely sat with his back to the room.

"You're ill?" Murphy asked.

"Thinking," said Stieve.

"Hey, there's Andrews now. Look at the babe with him! That must be his adopted daughter," said Murphy. "She's an actress."

"What's she playing now?"

"She isn't. They're holding up *Salome of the Ages* because she's Salome and she won't okay anybody for the leading male part. She says men today are a bunch of softies."

"Well," said Stieve gloomily, "ordinarily I might be challenged by such an attitude but right now I'm merely in a sort of stasis."

Stieve did not eat much and, after lunch, he saw Archaeology. They suggested he make the time-cast from 668 A. D. at the time when the Mayans first abandoned Chichen Itzá.

"Where is Chichen Itzá?" asked Stieve.

"On the Yucatan Peninsula down in Old Mexico."

"And they left suddenly?"

"Very suddenly," said the head research man. "That provides one of the major mysteries of prehistoric times—why a highly intelligent, culturally developed people should suddenly abandon their principal city and probably the entire peninsula."

"Maybe," Stieve murmured, "crooning is older than we think."

The research man stared at him and grinned. "I don't go for this modern stuff. I'm a classical man myself. Sinatra especially."

"Not for me," said Stieve. "I like the ancient yodelers."

"Well, anyway, the desertion of Chichen Itzá was sudden and complete—an overnight evacuation. Some authorities claim it was the encroaching jungle, some think it was an epidemic like the black death, others say it was the advancing armies of the Chichimecs, but our opinion here is that it is still a complete mystery.

"There was apparently no premeditation and the only adequate answer we can see would be an earthquake or volcano or something violent and unforeseeable—but there is no evidence of any sort of disaster."

Stieve had been somewhat preoccupied during this speech, but now he forced him-

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self to alertness. "Okay, we'll go to six hundred and sixty-eight," he said, "and try to find the answer for you."

So Stieve took the slow walk back toward his suite. He had just passed the Temporal Immigration Department when he heard a door slam and thunderous footsteps pounded down the hall after him.

He turned and prepared to get off the walk if necessary but when he saw what was coming he was near collapse—a giant caveman with a horsehide tied around his middle, with massive hairy chest, great arms, and oaklike legs. He carried a huge club on one shoulder.

"Mr. Stievandro!" he shouted.

"Davie Horsemeat," said Stieve weakly. "What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER II

Back With the Mayans

THE giant's broad face widened still more in a grin. "It is now twenty years after the invention of the wheel," he said. "The Azilians have chased us out. Dirty politics. They don't like us, because we proud Republicans. Also because we elected Wheel Queen," he added.

"Also because you probably did a lot of damage at close quarters with your clubs at what you might call the climax of the Wheel festivities."

Davie looked contrite. "We fight our best. That history. Pardon me. Not history. Paleolithic era before history. Anyhow, that tradition. One Cro-Magnard whip nineteen Azilians at close quarters."

"Then why are you here now? Why did you get pushed out?"

"Azilians come like flies. Too many for us. My poor arm weary from cracking Azilian heads." He swung his mighty club in a circle that took up practically all of the hallway. "Nineteen, twenty, forty, hundred in one day."

"Okay, okay." Stieve tried not to flinch. "Relax. Let your arm have a good long rest. Now what do you want?"

Davie Horsemeat's face lighted up in a tremendous smile. "You promise me contract on Broadway," he said eagerly. "I here."

Stieve gulped. "Yes—all of you. But look now. These things take time. You can't just walk in and grab a juicy part on Broadway without a build-up."

"What is build-up?"

"People don't know you. You need some publicity."

"Mr. Murphy said everybody know me from our timecast at invention of the wheel."

Stieve's eyes narrowed. "Murphy, eh? That reporter had better stay back in the Middle Ages."

"Well," said Davie Horsemeat impatiently, "you want I should get publicity?"

"Oh, my, no." Stieve spoke hastily. "Tell you what, Davie. Where you staying?"

"I sleep in hall last night. But I no like sleep on floor. Plastic floor too soft. I like rocks on cave floor."

"Okay," said Stieve. "Now I'll tell you. I'll get you a room in the Heptagon here, with plenty of rocks on the floor, and you sit tight for a couple of days till Orig Prem and I get back from our next trip. Then we'll dope out something."

Stieve couldn't think then anyway. He had too many things to worry about without trying to get three hundred pounds of Horsemeat on a Broadway stage.

In the meantime he turned Davie over to the Entertainment Committee and saw that he was assigned a room in the Guest Section with rocks on the floor. Then Stieve went back to his own suite.

He opened the door of his private office and went in sadly.

"Sir," said a slightly metallic but cheerful voice, "I wish you a good day."

"Thanks," Stieve said shortly and crossed the room to the big window.

The little robot, four feet three inches of shining, chrome-plated steel, studied him for a moment. "You are worried, sir. Perhaps Orig Prem can help you."

Stieve turned and looked at him. He couldn't tell Prem what was worrying him. After all it was a death sentence for Prem. How could he possibly tell him? Just the same he had to offer some explanation for his mood or Prem would be suspicious. The robot's thermionic relays were very fast-acting when he delved into Stieve's moods.

Stieve had an inspiration. He wheeled full on Prem and fixed a piercing stare on him. "Why," he demanded, "did you let Davie Horsemeat into two thousand two hundred and thirty-two?"

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He saw Orig's vanadium lips drop open and Orig's steel-wire eyebrows raised. "I beg your pardon, sir."

"You heard me," said Stieve, "or else your auditory circuit needs checking."

"Oh, no, sir. I heard you, sir." Orig hated going to the shop for repairs.

BUT Stieve was stern. "I suppose you went back to lecture to the ladies' aid on Hollywood or to coach Miss Horsemeat in preparation for a triumphal tour of Europe."

"Miss Horsemeat," said Orig Prem with dignity, "doesn't need any coaching, sir."

"Why did you go back, Prem?"

Then Orig surprised him. "But, sir, I haven't been back since the timecast."

Stieve stared at him. He started to call him a liar, but after all—well, Orig Prem *couldn't* lie unless Stieve wanted him to. He wasn't built that way. Stieve considered. "How did Davie Horsemeat get here, then?" he demanded.

"Is he—here?" Orig asked weakly.

"Of course he's here. Where have you been the last two days?"

A slight tinge of pink suffused Orig's steel-plated face. "Must I answer that?"

Stieve's eyes widened. "I asked you," he said pointedly.

Orig's steel eyelids dropped. "I've been running errands for Karen Karlyle, sir," he said in a low voice. "I didn't think you needed me, sir."

"Who the he—who is Karen Karlyle?"

"She's the adopted daughter of Andrews, the purchasing agent."

"Andrews? Andrews!" Stieve thundered. "Oh."

"Oh, what, sir?"

"So you've been hanging around Andrews' foster-daughter. It would serve you right if I should abandon you, Prem." Stieve drew a deep breath. "Go see Medlock. Go back to six hundred sixty-eight A. D. We're going to find out what caused the Mayans to leave Chichen Itzá so suddenly. Here's the brief from Archaeology."

Prem was beaming. "Oh, thank you, sir. I'm glad we are going on a job."

"No doubt," Stieve said dryly.

"I can tell you about the Mayans, sir. That information was built into me. They—"

"Dry it out," said Stieve in a gritty voice. "Follow orders."

"Yes, sir," said Orig, aggrieved. "I was only trying to be helpful, sir. You know my basic characteristic is helpfulness, sir. Do you remember what the adjuster said as he integrated my relays: 'A h—' "

"Yes," growled Stieve. " 'A helpful robot is a happy robot.' Now go!" he roared.

"Yes, sir."

Orig swallowed so hard his throat-plates clanked. He turned and left quietly, with his steel heels held high to avoid thudding on the rubber floor. He stopped at the outer door.

"I'll get things organized, sir."

"Okay," Stieve said quietly.

He shook his head. This was getting him. Everything Orig Prem did was like a letter from home to a lonesome prospector out on Pluto or Stygia.

What to do? How could he change the edict of the Purchasing Department? It would take something drastic. Solar News's red tape was almost immutable. He thought of finding a leading man for Karen Karlyle but that would never be enough to swing a decision that had been already made. Not in Solar News. Decisions made at Solar News were one degree more than irrevocable.

He wasn't going to let Prem be junked, but how could he prevent it? He could send Prem away somewhere but they'd find him sooner or later, even on another planet. Immigration regulations were rigid. Where, then, could Orig hide?

Stieve paced the floor. Maybe they could prolong the timecast from Chichen Itzá until —well.

FOR THE first time Stieve sank into a chair and smiled. Sure, that was it. Lose Orig Prem in time. Let him stay back with the Mayans.

Stieve exulted. Why hadn't he seen the answer before? Once Prem got back there he could get thoroughly lost.

The only thing was, Stieve didn't know how happy Prem would be with the Mayans. What if they didn't understand him? Maybe they'd put him in jail in a damp cell where his joints would rust.

No, it was unthinkable. He wouldn't go off and leave Prem in Chichen Itzá in 668. The answer came in a flash—he'd stay with him.

Stieve thought it over that night. The next day he called a company attorney and made a will—not that there was much to leave or any relatives to leave it to. But he

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made plans. By transition time he was ready. He looked once around his suite, then closed the door softly.

He took the fast walk to Traffic. Medlock's android was at the controls of the capsule and Stieve had a fleeting impression that the android avoided his eyes. Stieve shook hands with Medlock.

"Goodbye," he said, and climbed into the capsule and pulled the lid down. The last view he had of the world of 2232 was Medlock standing there with his mouth open. Stieve never had shaken hands before.

There was the familiar tightening spiral, in which Stieve seemed to be riding toward the bottom, a moment of blackness and dizziness and then—

Daylight.

He was standing in the middle of a stone-paved street. People were going busily by on both sides. They were dark-skinned, their faces heavy, with full thick lips. The women wore sleeveless garments of red, blue, yellow or brown, embroidered at top and bottom, and colored scarfs.

Stieve stopped a big hawk-nosed man and asked wonderingly, "Is this Chichen Itzá?" He didn't really expect to be understood.

But the Mayan grinned and said, "Sure. What you think? Coney Island?"

Stieve groaned. So this time Prem was teaching them some choice twentieth-century American repartee. But the Mayan's cheerfulness annoyed him. "I wouldn't be surprised," he said. "From all the scarfs and blankets, all we need is a hot-dog stand."

"Right around corner," the man said promptly and marched away.

Stieve walked around the corner and was looking down a long, broad thoroughfare. Far away, perhaps a mile, at the end of the road was a huge pyramid and on top of the pyramid was a temple.

Stieve stared a moment, then he sniffed. He turned. His brows drew together in an incredulous frown. The Mayan had not been fooling. Stieve faced a little stand with a big banner on top that said, *Hot-dogs 15c. Beware of Inferior Merchandise at Lower Prices. Our Hot-Dogs Made From First Grade Meat. Orig. Prem & Stieve Andro, Props.*

Stieve relaxed. So that was it, he thought. Prem had been picking up some loose Mayan change. But he had to be in trouble. This was the first time he had rung Stieve in on his enterprises.

He reached into his pocket for change. "Two dogs," he said but when he looked up he stared. The girl was dressed in red shorts and a yellow sweater. Her legs and arms were smooth and copper-colored. Her face was pretty, her hair glossy black, her curves —Stieve swallowed.

He stared at her while she split the buns and laid the hot-dogs between. Then she turned around. "Will you have mustard, sir. Catsup? Chili sauce?"

Stieve nodded absently. "Yeah."

She put on all three and added a slice of onion and a spoonful of pickle relish. Stieve looked at it and finally began to nibble on one corner. Then he saw the girl wore a badge saying, *Your waitress is Miss Huipl Matapa, selected as prime sacrifice to Iztamna at the next festival.*

Stieve gulped and stared. "What does that mean?"

She smiled. "Mr. Prem thought it would be a good business-getter. He persuaded the High Priest to let me take care of the stand until the sacrifices."

"Are *you* going to be sacrificed?"

CHAPTER III

What—No Mustard?

SHE nodded cheerfully. "I have been selected. Though I don't think it's been decided whether I am to be drowned in the Sacred Well or have my heart torn out by the priests."

Stieve choked. He put down his hot-dog carefully. "Must we be so brutally frank at meal-time?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir. By the way—" She was using her strong white teeth to bite into his coin. "I think you have given me a lead quarter, sir."

Ruefully Stieve went into his pocket again. "Prem taught you all the tricks, didn't he?"

She brightened. "Oh, no, sir. Not yet. But he has promised to."

Stieve looked at her speculatively. "When is this sacrifice, anyway?"

"Tonight at midnight."

"What's the sacrifice for?"

"To make the great Iztamna hear our prayers. The great Iztamna is the Father of Mankind. If he hears us he will turn back

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the monsters."

Stieve's ears pricked up. "What monsters?"

Miss Huipl looked puzzled. "Runners from the west have brought word that a great wave of monsters is advancing through the jungle at about twenty miles a day. It is said they are sent by the Chichimecs to—how is it Mr. Prem says—soften us up for invasion."

"What kind of animal could they be?" Stieve mused. "It sounds as if somebody propagated a herd of tyrannosaurs."

"We do not know what they may be but it is reported that they have conquered all in their path, so the True Man has said we must make prayers and sacrifices."

"Who is the True Man?"

"Mr. Prem calls him the Head Mogul, the Big Squeegee. Mr. Prem very original, don't you think?"

"Very," Stieve said dryly. "I wonder where he got that dictionary of nineteenth and twentieth-century slang."

"I beg your pardon, sir." Her head was cocked to one side.

"Just talking to myself," said Stieve. "Where is Mr. Prem now?"

"He is supervising the workmen on the timecast pyramid from which he will timecast the battle of the monsters. He is having the time-capsule there, too."

"You know a lot about Mr. Prem, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir," she said sweetly.

"By the way, is that another hot-dog stand across the street there?"

"Oh, yes, sir. That stand belongs to the Great Priest Ixtlil. He is very jealous of Mr. Prem. Is also very angry at Head-Priest for letting me work for Mr. Prem. He's trying to run us out of business."

Stieve read the sign on the other stand—*Ixtlil's Hot-doggerie. 10c Each. Pay No More. Our Hot-Dogs Made of Genuine Dog-Meat. Patronize a Home-Owned Establishment.*

"So," Stieve said wisely, "Ixtlil is a price-cutter."

Miss Huipl gave him explicit directions for finding the timecast pyramid. "You might get lost," she warned. "Chichen Itzá is city of half a million persons. And do not make a mistake and go to the sacrifice pyramid at the end of the street here."

"Thanks." Stieve crossed the road to the side she had indicated. The street was lined with mud-brick houses and Mayans sat along the street at the corner selling corn-cakes and tortillas, coconuts and papayas.

Stieve thought he would take a chance on a corn-cake, for they looked good. He bit into one and it was excellent. The Mayan gave him his change and said, "You're a lucky man, mister. If you had bought this corn-cake across the street it would have cost you twenty-five cents instead of twenty cents."

"How come?"

"It's a price war. Those fellows on the other side of the street are the fifteen-cent-doggers."

"And you? Are you the ten-cent-doggers?"

"Right. Those guys are capitalists. They have no mercy on you. But we believe in giving the common man a break."

"Swell," said Stieve.

WHEN he was halfway down the block he decided to count his change. He was a nickel short. He looked back and chuckled. "I don't suppose it's ethical to squawk, after that speech he gave me. It looks as if even the proletariat has to make a profit."

He found the timecast pyramid off to the left of the sacrifice pyramid and through the jungle. He climbed two hundred long steps to the top and was puffing and snorting when he reached the booth. If it had been three more steps, he though wearily, he couldn't have made it.

Orig Prem had just finished hooking up the audio and video plates and was testing his connections with distribution up in 2232. Orig put down the microphone and said, "Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon," said Stieve.

The little robot eyed Stieve and said, with just a trace of uncertainty in his voice, "I hope you will notice, sir, that I have refrained from my usual organizational efforts in Chichen Itzá."

"Outside of getting a big priest mad at you for interfering with the sacrifice," Stieve said sarcastically, "and being practically accused of violating the pure food and drug act and starting a price war and making the people common-man conscious—I'd say you have been very quiet around Chichen Itzá."

Prem's eyes were downcast. Now he ventured, "Have you met Miss Huipl, sir?"

"Yes," Stieve said sternly.

"Well? You know what is going to hap-

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pen tonight, sir. It's enough to make even a robot's life difficult, sir. I had to do something to keep my mind—pardon me, I mean my electrostatic relays—occupied."

"Okay." Stieve sounded resigned. "Can't say I blame you. Now what about these monsters from the west? What are they?"

"I don't know, sir. They are described as completely irresistible but the Mayans are making a real defense effort. See down there through the trees?"

"Ye-es. There are men working down there."

"That's right. Workmen are digging trenches and throwing up breastworks for three miles on each side of the pyramid here. By dark the trenches will be filled with the flower of Mayan warriors. We shall have a very good view of the battle, sir."

"What's the program for tonight?"

"The sacrifice is scheduled for midnight, sir. All reports indicate that the monsters will reach the scrimmage line shortly thereafter unless the gods intervene."

Stieve was thoughtful. "Are we to see the sacrifice?"

"Yes, sir. We are to be invited guests."

Stieve eyed him. "So is a turkey at a Thanksgiving dinner. How long will it take to get here from the temple?"

"About ten minutes, sir by a secret path Huipl—Miss Matapa showed me."

"By the way," Stieve said thoughtfully, "that was a very clever idea you had of picking the next sacrifice for your waitress. You've got a head on you for publicity—pardon me, I should have said an electronic integrator."

He went back down the two hundred steps. By the time he got down the exercise had made him hungry again, so he went back to the hot-dog stand.

"Give me two," he said, "and be careful what you talk about. With catsup only, this time."

"I'm sorry, sir, no catsup," said Miss Matapa sweetly. "This is six sixty-eight. We do not have catsup yet."

"What *is* this?" Stieve growled. "You had catsup at noon."

"I'm sorry, sir. That was a mistake. I'm afraid I annoyed Mr. Prem very much. He was quite put out with me—and I'm truly sorry, because Mr. Prem is such a fine person—pardon me, I should have said such a fine piece of machinery."

"What goes here? What was a mistake?"

"I have been informed by Mr. Prem that catsup originated in the East Indies," she said primly, "and was brought to the western hemisphere after the discovery of America by Columbus in fourteen hundred and ninety-two. Therefore we cannot possibly have catsup at this time. That would be an anachronism of the first order."

Stieve eyed her. "How about mustard, then?"

"Yes, sir. Coming up, sir."

HE SMEARED his hot-dogs with mustard and pushed the jar away. "Would it surprise you to know that mustard was unknown in this hemisphere until after the discovery of America by Columbus in fourteen hundred and ninety-two?"

She stared at him for a moment and then snatched the jar.

"Thank goodness for home-grown pickles," Stieve said with a smile.

He wished he knew more about the monsters. He doubted that any sort of monster could rout a well-trained army, even a primeval one, for the Mayans were good fighters and would be well armed with battleaxes and lances.

Well, they would timecast the battle and then, if the Mayans should win or if there should be any way to escape the monsters, Stieve would cut the time-capsule off from 2232 and he and Orig Prem would start a new life.

Before midnight Stieve and Prem were met by an usher and conducted up two hundred stone steps to the top of the sacrifice pyramid. Stieve was almost exhausted when they reached the top.

"Tip the usher a dollar. He's a fifteen-cent-dogger man," Prem whispered.

Stieve was puffing. "Why don't *you* tip him?" he said testily.

"I can't put it on the expense account," Prem whispered. Stieve laid some coins in the man's hand and then dropped to the stone bench. He didn't like the seat. It was a little too close to the altar.

The priests, dressed in jaguar skins and head-pieces of long green and red feathers, and the Head-Priest in a suit of black panther-skin had finished chanting and bowing. Hundreds of thousands of Mayan citizens down on the ground raised themselves from prostrate positions to their knees to watch the sacrifice.

The Head-Priest disappeared in the tem-

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ple. A moment later he came out, leading Miss Matapa by the hand. She was dressed in a snow-white robe. There was a mystic smile on her face.

She mounted the steps cut into the great stone and the Head-Priest helped her lie on her back with her head sloping down. Stieve's mouth was dry.

The priest lit pots of incense at her head and feet. He chanted and swayed. His voice rose in pitch. He raised his crooked flint knife above the girl's breast.

Stieve stole a glance at Orig Prem. There were great tears falling from Prem's pyrex eyes. Stieve blew his own nose loudly.

The girl lay still with her eyes closed, her copper skin lovely and smooth against her white robe, her black hair flowing down over the side of the altar-stone. The knife reached the top of its stroke.

Then Miss Matapa opened her great dark eyes. She turned her head a little and looked at the robot and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Prem, about the catsup. I misunderstood you. Really I did."

The Head-Priest stood as if petrified. Then a hawk-nosed priest with anger and hate in his eyes hissed, "The foreigners have defiled the sacrifice. They have offered insult to the great god Iztamna."

The Head-Priest glared at Stieve and Orig. Stieve licked his dry lips. It was not a good spot.

The hawk-nosed priest said sibilantly, "Their hot-dogs are adulterated with beef, Sire."

The Head-Priest took a hesitant step toward Stieve. The hawk-nosed one closed in, treading like a cat. The incense was suddenly strong in Stieve's nostrils. They seized him by the arms. But Stieve was not ready to appease the great god Iztamna.

He broke loose and punched the hawk-faced one in the nose but the Head-Priest got behind him and pinioned his arms. Stieve looked wildly for Prem. The robot was gazing sadly at Miss Huipl. He wasn't paying any attention to Stieve.

Well, Stieve didn't suppose Prem was really human anyway. He couldn't expect Prem to be motivated by sentiments as a man would be. But there was one thing Prem always understood—his job.

Stieve yelled, "Get away, Prem! Make the timecast."

Prem suddenly seemed to wake up. He took one look at the struggle, at Stieve being borne fighting to the altar and then, without hesitation, he launched his steel head at the hawk-nosed priest.

CHAPTER IV

Olfactory Invasion

A FLINT dagger was shattered on his chrome-plated back. He flicked the knife out of the Head-Priest's hand and Stieve tore free.

Stieve started to run, then turned. He snatched up Miss Huipl from the altar and threw her over his shoulder. He vaulted down the steps of the sacrifice temple, two at a time, at terrifying speed. He did not know how he was able to keep his feet. Behind him Orig Prem was delaying pursuit.

He found the path through the trees and, in a few minutes, he was struggling up the two hundred stone steps of the timecast pyramid. This time he barely made it. He staggered over the top and set Miss Huipl on her feet and lay there, fighting for breath.

He was astonished to hear Prem's metallic voice above him. "Sir, did you walk up the steps?"

"Do you think I rode a white mouse with a side-car?" Stieve asked between pants.

"But, sir," said Prem, "why didn't you take the escalator? I had it built especially for you, sir."

Stieve choked. Then he heard the muttering growl of the crowd. He vaulted to his feet, shoved Miss Huipl into the time-capsule, slammed the lid and threw the outside switch.

He and Prem turned as one and faced each other and grinned. Then Stieve put out his hand. "You saved my life, Prem. Thanks."

A rose color suffused the robot's steel-plated face. He averted his eyes and shyly extended his articulated fingers.

Stieve was ashamed of himself for having doubted Prem but right now he felt he had done ample penance by climbing those stairs. Anyway he knew by now that Prem was human. He turned to the vision-scanner.

"Let 'em come," he said. "It's making a good scene."

The heavily robed priests were struggling up the pyramid steps in the light of ten thousand torches. By now they were half-

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way up and at their heels were thousands of fanatical Mayans, pouring up all four sides of the pyramid as the priests exhorted them to vengeance on the foreigners for interfering with the sacrifice.

Stieve grinned. "Looks as if the fifteens and the tens got together pretty quick. Hey, watch that bunch coming up the escalator there!"

A solid stream of Mayans was almost at the timecast booth. Prem touched a switch. The escalator reversed itself and started back down.

The priests were three fourths of the way up now. The fumes from the resin in the torches burned Stieve's eyes, and the sound of the mob had grown into a full-throated roar.

But suddenly there was a smell—a musky smell that made Stieve's flesh crawl.

The Mayans sniffed it too. The hawk-nosed priest paused. The odor became stronger. The masses climbing the pyramid paused.

Then a great shout went up from the Mayans on the west side of the pyramid. It was picked up by others and grew and swelled into a mighty terrified shriek:

"The monsters! The monsters come!"

Those at the bottom of the pyramid started back down. The mob turned. They began to fight as hard to go back as they had fought to climb the pyramid. In a moment the hundreds of thousands had reversed their movement. In two minutes there was not a Mayan left within sight of the pyramid.

Now the effluvium was almost overpowering. Stieve trained the spotlight on the forest at the west. He and Prem waited breathlessly. That is to say Stieve was breathless. Prem, of course, did not breathe anyway.

But Prem sniffed and made a face. Stieve tied his handkerchief over his nose. The musk was of some awful, undreamed-of monster just awakened from its lair after an age-long sleep.

DOWN on the ground at their left a Mayan soldier jumped out of the trench with a yell and started running back toward town. His officer caught up with him, beheaded him with an axe, turned to go back—and then gave up. He began to run toward town also.

A dozen other soldiers jumped out of the trenches with wild yells and started back. Then the fever shot down the line. Soldiers by the hundreds and thousands, overcome by fear and that awful stench, leaped out of the trenches and deserted the line of battle. In a moment the trench was empty. Stieve looked to the right. There too the Mayan army had fled.

Stieve watched the west. There was movement. Out of the jungle of mahogany and sapote trees came a line of curious crawling creatures, worming along the ground like giant caterpillars. The creatures were black and white. They came slowly but steadily toward the pyramid.

Stieve held his nose as he made the announcement: "For those of you who tuned in late, ladies and gentlemen of twenty-two hundred thirty-two, you have just witnessed the rout of the Mayan army of thirty thousand picked warriors by the advancing wave of a mysterious migration of North American skunks."

Stieve looked at Prem. The robot was gasping for air. Stieve was strangling. The appearance of the skunks had upset everything. It was easy to see now why the Mayan nation had disappeared overnight without any evidence of motivation.

This unexpected turn upset things for them too. They couldn't possibly stay. They'd have to go back and fight it out with the Purchasing Department some way. Stieve grabbed Prem and shoved him into the time-capsule. Better to face Smullen. Stieve pulled the switch, then gasping, jumped in himself and pulled the lid down over his face.

He stepped down, with Medlock steadying his arm. "Hey, some chick you sent back here," said Medlock. "Boy, can you pick 'em! But what is Smullen going to say?"

"By the time Smullen gets around to Miss Huipl," Stieve said grimly, "he won't have anything left to say that I can't take. Where's Prem?"

"He's taken Miss Huipl to the nurse."

"Okay," said Stieve. "Now I'm going to see Smullen and have this out."

He took the fast walk. Smullen raised his bald head and smiled all over and shook hands. "Great timecast! Cleared up one of the greatest mysteries of history! Great shots, too. Plenty of action. Swell riot scenes!"

"It was worth a lot of hot-dogs," Stieve said grimly. "Look, Smullen—"

"Excuse me a minute." Smullen pressed a

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button. "Smullen. . . . Yes? . . . Thanks, thanks, glad to hear it" He turned to Stieve. "Saturn liked the riot-scenes; they said the burning torches reminded them of ancient days when Saturn was warmer than two hundred below zero. They just renewed their contract for three years. Great work, Stieve. You'll get a raise for this."

But Stieve didn't smile. "What will Prem get?"

Smullen's mouth opened. "Oh, didn't have time to tell you about that. Karen Karlyle saw your Mr. Horsemeat around the building and went batty over him for her leading man in her new play. He had a try-out yesterday and I understand he'll be a sensation."

"Thank goodness," said Stieve. "Mr. Horsemeat is disposed of. But—"

"Well, Miss Karlyle got into a fuss with her foster-father over Mr. Horsemeat and then Mr. Murphy's android reported the fuss to Mr. Murphy and Mr. Murphy got suspicious. He cross-examined his android, and it finally came out that Mr. Andrews, the purchasing agent, was an android who slipped into a position in Solar some years ago and had risen to purchasing agent.

"He adopted Miss Karlyle when she was twelve years old, it seems. Well, that's all of that, I guess. Andrews was trying to replace robots with androids all through the organization. Blood, even artificial blood, is thicker than electric current, I guess."

STIEVE caught his breath. "You mean, they're not putting on the heat to scrap Prem any more."

"Absolutely not," Smullen assured him, beaming.

"Thank goodness," Stieve said fervently. "By the way, did you find out who let Davie Horsemeat forward in time?"

Smullen sighed. "It seems that originally that was Murphy's idea of a joke."

Stieve didn't smile. He knew about Murphy's idea of a joke. He also knew that Murphy wouldn't refrain from a joke just because it might happen to cause trouble for Stieve. Murphy always had complained that Stieve had the best run in time.

"Well," said Smullen, "Murphy talked to his android about it, and the android talked to Medlock's android and together they put it over to cause worry for you. Murphy confessed when he found out what Andrews was trying to do to Prem.

"He ferreted out the truth about Mr. Andrews by way of penance to you, Stieve. Murphy is a very good-hearted fellow." Smullen sighed. "The only thing is, he hasn't had enough to keep him busy. I've got to put him on another run, I'm afraid."

Stieve's eyes were narrow. "Why not let him do a feature on the Texas Alamo—from the Alamo side?"

Smullen looked up. "You mean where there was only one survivor?"

Stieve nodded sharply. "And his name wasn't Murphy."

Smullen laughed heartily. "Now about this request by Orig Prem?"

Stieve sat up. "Yes?"

"He requests authorization for time-travel to various periods so he can lecture to women's clubs and so on about Hollywood. It seems he's organizing a regular circuit. He wants to start with Cleopatra's time—"

Stieve got up hastily. "Excuse me, sir, for interrupting. Will you give me a requisition to the Assembly Department for one of those portable oxyacetylene welding torches?"

Smullen looked puzzled. "Well, I guess so. What are you going to do with it?"

"We've been in four time-streams in the last month," said Stieve, "and every time Prem has gotten me in trouble. This is too much."

"Yes?"

"Prem," said Stieve grimly, "has organized once too often. This time I'm going to take that torch and warm the little monster's bottom."

NEXT ISSUE

ON THE HOUSE

Another Orig Prem Novelet

By BENJ. MILLER

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"D-d-don't be scared, honey," said Jick

The Himalaychalet

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

Venusians muscle in on the vacation of Oona and Jick!

IT WAS Mrs. Worthington-Weens and a lama when Oona answered the chime.

"The lama and I have come over to help you mediate," Mrs. Worthington-Weens said.

Oona swallowed. It wasn't at all convenient: Jick was taking a bath, and lunch was due in twenty minutes; and they'd planned to go hiking on Everest this afternoon with oxy-packs and anti-gravs.

"M-m-mediate?" she asked.

"Certainly." Mrs. Worthington-Weens sounded irritated. She always got cross if you didn't understand what she was talking about right away. "We were talking about it yesterday." She and the lama

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stepped off the top of the escalator and into the living room of the chalet. "Aren't the Martians still annoying you?"

Oona hesitated. It was true the Martians down the valley still played a lot on their zulcitrets, and at first Oona had found it terribly annoying. Their music sounded just like somebody rubbing a wet finger up and down a windowpane. But it was the kind of noise you could get used to, if you tried, and Oona had gotten used to it. Really, Mrs. Worthington-Weens was a lot more of a nuisance than the Martians were.

"Well—" Oona said.

The lama (he was a short, stocky man who smelled strongly of rancid butter and something else Oona couldn't identify but rather thought was yak) seated himself on the floor.

"Pull blinds," he said peremptorily to Mrs. Worthington-Weens, and then, to Oona, "Sit here." He indicated a spot on the floor opposite the door of the bedroom.

Obediently, Oona sat. She did hope they weren't going to stay long.

The lama looked at her critically. "Feet all wrong," he said. "Fold them, thus." He illustrated.

Oona, her joints cracking, followed his instructions. Mrs. Worthington-Weens left the window and sat down by Oona's side.

"He's going to mediate between you and evil," she said into Oona's ear. "Evil is the Martians, and of course you represent good. Whenever he pauses in the scripture reading, you say 'Om' and I'll say 'Hum.' The mystic syllables, you see. I'll punch you, so you'll know."

The lama got a manuscript out of the sleeve of his fuzzy brown felt robe and began to read. It sounded like somebody saying, "bong bong bong" over and over again. He paused. "Hum," said Mrs. Worthington-Weens. She punched Oona in the ribs. "Om," Oona said.

THE bedroom door opened a crack and Jick looked out. His jaw dropped. He frowned. Oona, catching his eye, shook her head desperately. There was a moment's hesitation, and then Jick closed the door softly again. Oona heard a click and then a faint buzz. Lucky Jick, he was scanning the stereo.

The lama had not noticed the interruption. "Bong bong bong," he said. "Bong, bong, bong." "Hum," said Mrs. Worthington-Weens. Punch. "Om," Oona said.

They left at fifteen fifteen. Oona, almost paralyzed from the hours of sitting with her insteps pressed against the muscles of her legs, was barely able to get to the door to let them out.

"We'll be back tomorrow to help you," Mrs. Worthington-Weens said as they went down.

"This can't go on, honey," Jick said after he and Oona had begun their long-delayed lunch. It was hard to understand him; he had been eating for dear life, and even now his mouth was full. "Whyn't you just not go to the door when the old battle-axe comes around? After all, it's our chalet."

Oona shook her head. "I tried it once," she said, "and she stood at the front door, chiming, for three-quarters of an hour. And then she went around to all the windows of the chalet she could reach and looked in them. It was terrible. I'd rather let her in and get it over with."

"Um." Jick helped himself to a double portion of Mangosteen Cream Cake. "I don't know why it is," he said, speaking between chews, "but whenever you try to get yourself a little hideaway, away from it all, everybody wants to move in and get away from it all with you. Look at us, thousands of kilometers in the Himalayas besides this spot to choose from! And yet we've got Mrs. Worthington-Weens in a chalet on one side of us, and the Martians on the other. Well, now, let's see. She comes around to mediate over you, doesn't she, because the Martians keep playing on their zulcitrets?"

"That's what she says."

"So if you couldn't hear the noise of the zulcitrets, she'd stop bothering you, wouldn't she?"

"Well, I guess she would," Oona replied cautiously. She stretched out one leg and wriggled her toes. Yes, the circulation was coming back; there'd been a while when she had felt that she was made of glass from her hip joints down.

"Obviously," Jick said, "the thing to do is to get an antiphone. You know, those things they use in the cities to kill the noise. I'll call Davis and ask him. He'll know where we can get one to rent."

He went over to the video. Oona, left alone at the table, looked out the window toward the vast rosy bulk of Everest and sighed. It was too bad. Jick was working a four-day week now, and they only had three days to spend at the chalet. And Mrs.

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Worthington-Weens (darn her) and the lama had mediated so long that hiking was out of the question for today. The sun was beginning to set, and Everest really was sort of dangerous at night.

"The antiphone'll be at Amritsar day after tomorrow morning," Jick said, coming back to his seatette. "We'll pick it up there. Hope it works."

"So do I."

* * * * *

Oona realized, as the high, thin squeereech of the zulcitrets became inaudible, how much the noise had been bothering her.

"It's wonderful!" she said.

"Quite an improvement, hum?" Jick said, turning to her with a smile. He made a small adjustment with a key. "There, now it's beamed toward the Martians' chalet. It won't affect audibility from any other direction, though."

Someone chimed at the door. "It's Mrs. Worthington-Weens," Jick reported, "and the lama. I'm going into the bedroom. I'll come out after they've gone. Good luck!"

Oona had no luck. Mrs. Worthington-Weens disapproved of the antiphone and said so. "Mere illusion," she sniffed. She looked accusingly at Oona through her lorgnon. "Maya in its worst form. An attempt to evade true reality by means of the cheap scientific jugglery of the West. I'm going to turn it off."

She did. Oona winced as the noise of the zulcitrets filled the house once more. She felt confused. "I thought Buddhists believed everything physical was an illusion," she objected falteringly.

"That's the old-fashioned sort of Buddhists," Mrs. Worthington-Weens briskly explained. "The lama's a member of the New Modern Orthodox Reformed Buddhist Brotherhood. *We* know that everything is real except the so-called discoveries of western materialism."

The lama seated himself cross-legged on the floor, and Mrs. Worthington-Weens followed suit. "Over there, dear," she said kindly to Oona who was hesitating in the doorway. "The lama wants you to sit down so he can mediate a little more for you."

The lama got the same old Tibetan manuscript out of the sleeve of his low quality felt robe. "Bong bong bong," he began to read. "Hum," Mrs. Worthington-Weens said. She punched Oona. "Om," Oona said helplessly.

JICK was furious. "I won't put up with it!" he stormed. He was walking up and down the floor of the chalet, kicking things aside with his feet. "That old donina's going to let us alone if I have to throw her and that yappy lama of hers out by the hair! I won't put up with it. Blast it, we didn't come thousands of kilos to get mediated to death."

He kicked a Martini table down to one end of the living room and followed it with a hassock and a couple of taffets.

Oona frowned thoughtfully. It was horrid having Jick angry, even though it wasn't at her.

"Maybe we could make it so uncomfortable around here she'd leave by herself," she suggested after an interval.

"That's an idea," Jick replied. "Maybe we could." He picked up the hassock, brought it back to its proper place, and sat down on it. "I've got to think."

Oona brought a plate of antipasto and a ewer of steam beer into the dining apse. If Mrs. Worthington-Weens kept on mediating with her, Oona could see that she was going to put on a lot of weight. Mediation depressed her so much that she ate and ate afterwards, trying to cheer herself up.

"I've got it," Jick said, pouring beer into his glass. "Have you ever seen a 'Wet Paint' sign?"

Oona considered. "Not since I was a little tiny girl," she replied. "I guess they don't use them any more. Why?"

"I only found out why the other day myself. It seems that nowadays, as soon as a painting job is done, the contractor installs a low-power concealed ultrasonic outfit near it—like the 'Guardeens' they use in buildings under construction at night. The ultrasonic outfit gives out waves of a frequency that make anybody who gets near it feel uneasy and afraid. The consequence is, that though paint's just as wet as it ever was, nobody'd get near enough to touch it on a bet.

"You get the idea, baby? If we can get one of those ultrasonic outfits with more power, and beam it toward Mrs. Worthington-Weens— Well, she'll soon be going somewhere else to live."

Oona and Jick brought the ultrasonic outfit with them when they came out to the Himalaychalet the next week end. Davis, who knew a lot about sound, came along to supervise the installation.

"It's too bad this is an old model," he

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said, puffing a little as he set it down in its place. "The new ones are a lot more compact and lighter to carry around. And they're fully automatic. This one, unfortunately, has manual controls." He began to fiddle with wires and dials.

"Does that make any difference?" Oona asked.

Davis fingered his lower lip. "Well—somebody has to stay here to keep the ultrasone functioning. And while it's beamed down the valley toward your neighbor, Mrs. What's-her-name, there may be back eddies in your chalet. They can be pretty unpleasant, sometimes."

"You mean we may get some ultrasonic effects here?" Jick asked.

"You may. If you do, try to ignore them. Really, they don't mean a thing."

"It won't bother the Martians, though, will it?" Oona asked. The poor, good Martians—by contrast with Mrs. Worthington-Weens, Oona had grown quite fond of them.

"Un-unh. It's not beamed toward them, and their nervous organization's not the same as ours, anyhow. Funny thing about ultrasonics—this length I'm using on your neighbor drives terrestrials wild, but Martians don't mind it at all, and Venusians take to it like weetareetes to cream." Davis finished his adjustment of the dials. "Now if you'll take me down to Amritsar to catch the air bus before dark—" he said. "And remember, don't let any back eddies you may get bother you."

WHEN Jick got back from Amritsar station, they turned the ultrasonic projector on. Oona listened carefully. She couldn't hear a thing. Of course, she hadn't really expected to, but it was disappointing all the same.

Yes, disappointing. How disappointing and how sad life was, when you came down to it. There was sadness everywhere you looked. The poor Martians, for example, screeching away on their pathetic zulcitrets and never realizing how ephemeral and unhappy their little lives were. Mrs. Worthington-Weens, trying, with the help of her smelly old lama, to hide from herself—how barren and empty her life was. Sad . . . Sad . . . Sadness everywhere you looked. Tears began to run down Oona's cheeks.

"What's the matter, honey girl?" Jick asked. He looked quite pale, and his voice was odd and strained.

"Life's so pathetic," Oona answered, trying not to sob. A tear dripped down on her neck.

Jick reached over and patted her hand sympathetically. "It certainly is," he said in tones of deep depression. "I never realized it before, Oona, but it certainly is."

He got up and went over to the dial. As he turned it slightly to the left, Oona felt her gloom turn to a deep uneasiness. Something terrible was going to happen. She was sure of it. She'd never thought of it before, but the Himalaychalet was the worse place in the world to be in in an avalanche. And they were going to have an avalanche before morning. She could feel it in her bones. They'd be caught in it like rats in a trap.

"Let's get out of here!" Jick said suddenly.

"Before the avalanche crushes us?" Oona asked.

"Avalanche? No, not that. Before the polar bears break in and eat us up."

Polar bears? Oona stared at him. Suddenly something in her brain seemed to click. She imparted her discovery to her spouse.

"It's just the back eddies," she said breathlessly. "There really aren't any polar bears, Jick, or any avalanche. None of this is real— Wh-what was that?"

"What was what?"

"I saw it going past the window just then—a horrible white thing. Jick, I'm sure—I'm sure—it was a ghost!"

Jick did not laugh at her. His face was white and drawn. "Try to realize it's the back eddies, dear," he said. He sounded as if he were going to begin stuttering. "Just as you said, this isn't real. None of it. And remember, if it's affecting us so much, what must it be doing to Mrs. Worthington-Weens!"

As the night wore on, that thought was all that kept Oona going. Jick suggested that she go to bed and try to get some sleep. (He'd make the adjustments on the ultrasonic projector himself.) Desperately, Oona refused. It seemed to her that if she had to go into the bedroom by herself, she'd hide under the bed and try to burrow through the floor boards in search of added security. The chalet was haunted, haunted! Why hadn't she realized it before?

Dawn came at last. The glorious bulk of Everest began to grow solid against the sky. It was like the rampart of heaven, like the gate of another world. How awful it was, how truly horrible, that anything so

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lovely should be infested with demons, vampires, afreets, ghouls!

By the time full day arrived, Oona had broken down completely. She sat huddled on the floor in a corner of the room, her head between her knees. It—they—the dead things outside the chalet—were letting her and Jick live, for the time, because they enjoyed gloating over their prey. There was no escape. A wail broke from her lips.

Jick knelt beside her and embraced her tenderly. "D-d-don't be scared, honey," he said. His teeth were chattering. "It's just the b-b-back eddies. All those lions and leopards out there, and even the—the—*bears*"—(he shuddered) "—none of them are real." He gave an unconvincing laugh. "We just think there are lions and—and so on, out there. N-n-none of them are *real!*"

The copter van came for Mrs. Worthington-Weens and her effects at seven fifteen. When the last barrel and box had been carried out, Jick turned the ultrasonic outfit off. Oona sighed and opened her eyes.

"Has she gone?" she asked.

"Yep." Jick stood in the middle of the room, stretching and giving big yawns. "Gosh, if the old girl went through what we did, I feel almost sorry for her. That was some night. What do you say we have some breakfast, kid, and then go for a hike? I know you're tired, but we'll have the anti-gravs, and I'd sort of like to get away from the chalet for a while."

Before they left, Jick turned the ultrasone on low. "Just in case Mrs. Worthington-Weens gets any ideas about coming back," he explained. "And now, baby, let's enjoy ourselves. Our troubles are over."

THEY had a lovely hike; they went nearly to the top of Everest before Oona got tired. When they got back, Oona hunted out the best dinner there was in the freezer (it cost 4.5 I.Us, but she was feeling in a mood to celebrate) and popped it into the Thermolux to heat up. Then she went out on the balcony to admire the view.

What a wonderful view it was! Now that Mrs. Worthington-Weens had gone, Oona could really appreciate it again. Yes, a wonderful, wonderful view. Oona sighed with pleasure.

She started. *What was that smell?*

The base of it was fish, spoiled, oily, fish, but there was something bitter in it and something like skunk. Oona sniffed twice, her face puckering with disgust, before she placed it. Venusians! All terrestrials, without exception, found their odor disagreeable. And now a bunch of Venusians was moving into Mrs. Worthington-Weens' chalet.

Even as she dashed in to turn the ultrasone off, Oona reflected that it was probably too late. The ultrasonic waves, no doubt, had led the Venusians to sublet the chalet in the first place, but they weren't going to move out just because the waves were shut off. Oh, dear.

There was a chime at the door. With lagging steps Oona went to answer it. Probably it was the Venusians come to pay their respects; they were extremely punctilious in social affairs. Their manners were beautiful, but Oona never enjoyed talking to them. It wasn't only the way they smelled, it was the way they talked. It was sort of gurgling and tongue-tied and it sounded like too much saliva and too few teeth.

The people at the door were plump, even for Venusians. The biggest one, the one with six chins and two stomachs and whose name was Shallot-s'hu, had brought a fossilized "Dardanor" epiphyte as a friend's gift, and the others had brought presents, too. Their manner were lovely, no matter how much the Venusians themselves smelled like fish, and Oona felt herself begin to warm to them.

Jick came in and was introduced. Shallot-s'hu complimented him, with a tactful shyness, on his chalet and his wife. Jick looked at her proudly and grinned, and Oona couldn't help being pleased. Darn it, the Venusians were really nice!

The visitors rose to go. Shallot-s'hu hesitated. "Zee monks and bonzes down zee valley," he said, "do zey ever bodder you? All zat chanting and ritual?"

"Once in a while," Jick admitted.

Shallot-s'hu looked pleased. "Zat I can help you wit," he said. "As a friend to a friend. We natives of Zamotzah have a zing, a reading, we use in cases like zeese. If you will all please sit down upon zee floor—yes. Zee feet, so. And when I pause in zee reading, dear friends, please make zee vocable, 'ahom.'"

He got a small green book out of his trouser cuff and began to read. It sounded like "zzzinnng zzinnng 11111 zzzinnng." Oona, squatting uncomfortably on her heels, stole a look at Jick. My, but his face was red.

(Concluded on page 155)

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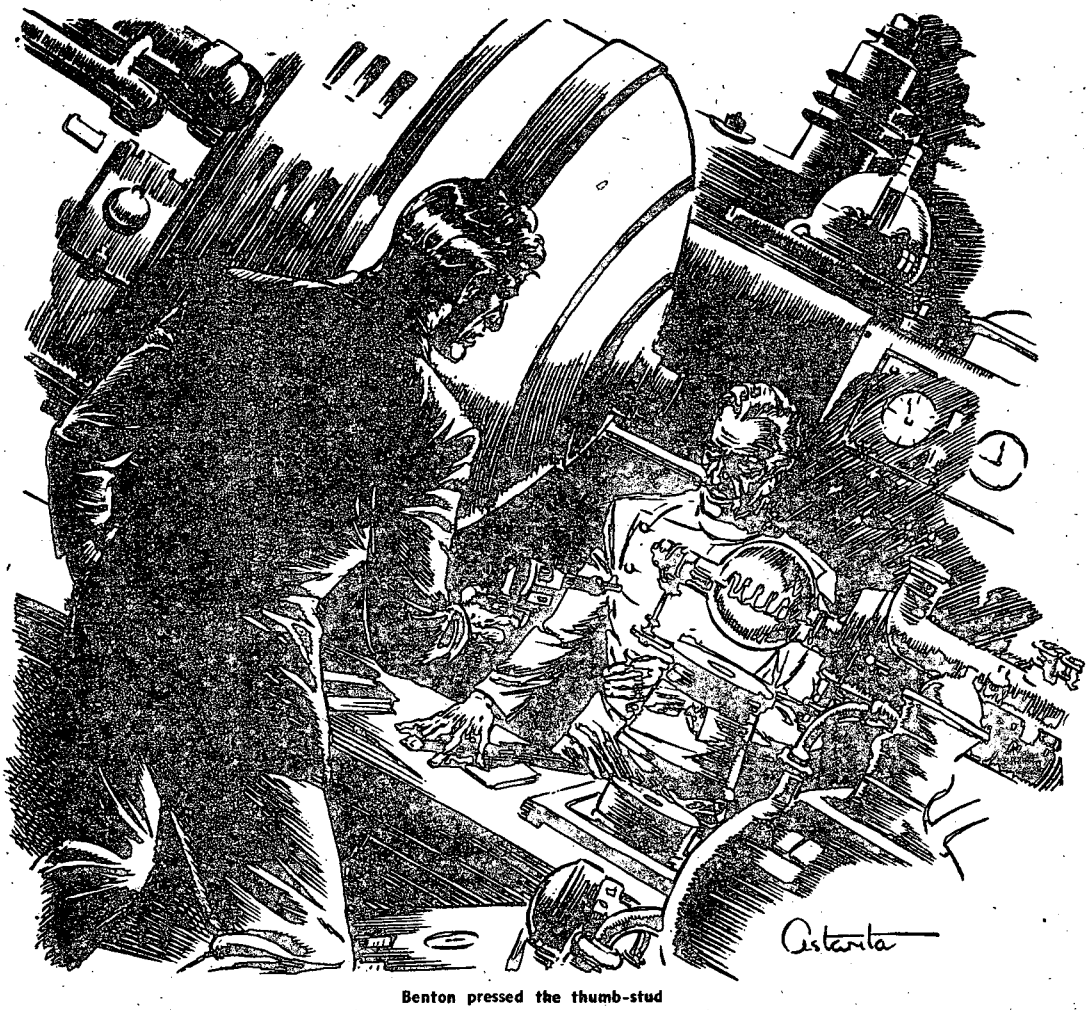
MESSENGER



Benton pressed the thumb-stud

A modern Mercury takes wings in a race with death!

THE TWO guns spoiled the lines of Bentow's carefully fitted coat. No one but he and his tailor would have noticed it, but he would be happy when he had used them and had done with the whole business.

He stepped out of the administrative corridor into the south end of Generator Room No. 5, and glanced down its enormous length. The great dynamos crouched off into distance like an avenue of hulking houses. A slight movement in the gleaming street between them made Bentow step back into the corridor.

By THEODORE STURGEON

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After an interminable wait old Zeitz, the section night watchman, trudged by, his eyes cast down, his ancient legs transmuting these indoor distances into his rounds just as mechanically as the purring monsters about him turned motion into power.

When he had gone, Bentow put his sleek head out of the corridor again, and then stepped into the room. Staying close to the aluminum-clad wall, he walked quickly to the end of the room and along it to the open doorway of Condenser Station No. 48, where his inspection route charts had shown him that Auckland Ford should be.

Ford, straight and gray, was there standing with his level eyes on the instrument panel inside. He turned in surprise as Bentow stepped inside.

"Well," he said, smiling, "You're about the last person I ever expected to see where the work gets done."

Bentow forced himself to return the smile. "Public relations isn't all cocktails and stuffed shirts, Mr. Ford," he said. "I worked right through midnight tonight, and since I was at the plant, I thought I'd bone up a little on how things work. You'd be surprised how many technical questions are asked at those cocktail parties."

"So this is research? Well, I'm glad to help. This is the first thing you've done that I can like, Bentow."

"You really do dislike me, don't you?" Bentow said frowning.

"I didn't say that," said Ford. "I just don't give a hang one way or the other. Hope I'm not being too frank."

"Not at all," said Bentow stiffly. He wet his lips. "Your daughter appears to have a certain amount of respect for me."

"That isn't respect," said Ford bluntly. "She's too young to know what respect is. She can understand authority and she knows who brings the feed pan. But if she wants to marry you, it's all right with me. You're not a bad catch. You've got a good income, a really impressive array of false front, and plenty of good looks. Dorcas is a sweet kid, but I faced the fact long ago that she's not too bright."

"She is everything in the world I want," said Bentow solemnly.

"Good," said Ford. "And, by Heaven, I expect you to behave accordingly, or you'll answer to me!"

Overhead a horn honked—a series of five unpleasant *beeps*.

"That's my call," said Ford. "Early. My reports not due for another ten minutes. Just a second, Bentow."

He stalked out the low doorway and took down the phone which hung outside. Bentow shuffled his feet nervously and then moved to the far bulkhead, where he would be out of sight of the generator room. Ford was back in a moment.

"Just a reminder that the manifold in eighty-seven needs a special inspection," he said.

"Did you tell them I was here?" Bentow asked.

"I did not. It wasn't a social call."

"But you'll make your routine report ten minutes from now?"

"Of course."

"Just wondered," said Bentow, and thought to himself, "I'd better wait until after he reports. Killing ten minutes will give me a little practice. Do my killing by stages—"

"Well, what did you want to know?" asked Ford.

"Oh—I know pretty much the general principles," said Bentow. "A mercury-vapor power plant using the atomic-pile heat from the transmutation factory. But tell me about these condenser stations, just as if I were some curious bubblehead at a cocktail party."

FORD gave him a somewhat pitying look, and finally said, "All right, Mr. Curious Bubblehead from a cocktail party." He grinned while Bentow winced. "These stations are not the condensers themselves; those are all underneath. But the mercury lines pass through here—high-pressure ones to the turbines, low-pressure ones to the exhaust chambers of the condensers. These stations check the pressures on each, all the time."

"What exactly for?" Bentow queried.

"Well, the pressure data are matched with generator output to determine the working efficiency; with mercury-flow checks to determine the volatilization rate—that has everything to do with the chemical purity of the mercury—and, most of all, to check for leaks."

"Yes. I know that's important. The stuff is quick poison at those pressures."

"Mercury vapor is poison at any pressure," said Ford. "But at these pressures—" he pointed to the great trunks of the ducts which led through the back wall and down

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into the floor—"750 pounds per square inch to the turbines, and a mere 60 pounds for exhaust, the vapor can reach a lethal concentration like *that!*" and he snapped his long fingers. "The tiniest pin hole in one of those trunks over there would mean a deadly concentration of vapor here in seconds!"

"And how long would it take to kill a man?" Bentow asked curiously.

"Only a few minutes."

"But any of you operators can smell the stuff before it gets dangerous, can't you?"

"No. A concentration of only one part in one hundred thousand in air is dangerous. A man would be seriously poisoned by the time he felt anything at all," said Ford.

Bentow thought this over for a moment before asking, "Well, what protects you?"

Ford pointed to a small box, screened, on a shelf. Blue-white light hovered around it. "Ikey does," he said.

"Oh, yes—the spectral detector. Just how does it work?"

"Well, you know how dark lines show up on a spectroscope?"

"I think so," said Bentow. "If you put a sheet of cadmium-tinted glass over your spectroscope and shoot the sun, you'll get dark lines on the cadmium sector of the solar spectrum."

"That's roughly the idea. Well, Ikey there has a photo-electric cell with a mercury filter over it. Trained on it is a mercury-vapor lamp. If any trace of mercury vapor occurs in the air in here, the value of the light that reaches the cell changes because of the spectral lines which occur behind the filter. Then Ikey goes into action."

Bentow looked at his elaborate wrist watch. He knew all this, but it didn't hurt to check again while he waited.

"Well, first of all he sets up a yell," Ford continued. "There are screechers all around the plant; if you've ever heard one once you'll never forget it. Then he automatically shuts the door to this station and starts blowers to change the air."

"Shuts the door? But suppose someone is in here?"

"There's a push-button outside the door, by the phone."

"Oh yes," said Bentow. "I noticed it. It has a light over it."

"That's right. Well, when I come in here I push it. The light lights, and if anything should happen in here the door will stay open until I can get out and push the button. If I should be hurt, someone else will be along but quick, fish me out, and close the door. But if no one is here, the door will close as soon as the alarm starts."

"Ah," said Bentow. "And suppose you forget to push the button when you first come in?"

"You *don't* forget," said Ford grimly.

The overhead horn sounded a series of five beeps again.

"My report," said Ford.

"Don't mention that I'm here," said Bentow swiftly. "This is a little irregular, you know."

"More irregular for me than for you," said Ford. "I'm working. Don't worry, I won't." He went out.

BENTOW shifted the guns in his side pockets tensely, and leaned back against the bulkhead. "I'm working," he muttered under his breath.

Why should Auckland Ford work? he wondered. The man was brilliant; had been ever since his youth, when, as the winner of a talent search, he had done that phenomenal job on heat-transfer devices. At lot of that work was built into this very plant—the slow viscous flow of Fordium, as it was called, from the pile jackets to the mercury boilers was Ford's development. The heavy stuff was incredibly stable, and absorbed little radiation from the hellish fury of the piles. It transferred plenty of heat and a negligible amount of radiation to the boilers.

Ford was a wealthy man—one of the wealthiest in this part of the world. But what did he do with his money? Gave it away, a lot of it. The rest moldered in banks, awaiting yet another of his fantastically generous impulses. The charity called Providence had benefited, no one knew how much, from Ford's gifts.

Providence, with its subsidies of pure science, or applied science in any field which furthered the humanities—such as a lie-detector which was now accepted by the courts; nine specialized cancer cures, a bombardment technique which preserved food in cellophane jackets without refrigeration, and so on and on.

And now, according to the word that Ford's pretty but slightly stupid daughter had dropped, Ford was going to will everything he owned to Providence, as soon as Julius, his attorney, returned from the coast, which would be this week. And what

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did he, Bentow, want with that empty-headed doll without her enormous inheritance?

Bentow glanced around the bare room. There were the two huge mercury trunks. There was Ikey, the detectors, who would start to yell when one part of mercury vapor in two billion of air showed itself. He would like very much to impair Ikey's efficiency, but did not dare. Ikey would be one of the first things inspected after the "accident."

Aside from the pressure indicators, there was very little else in the room, except a spanner or two and a small first-aid kit. Bentow nodded in satisfaction.

Ford came in, his long gray eyes going immediately to the gauges. Apparently satisfied, he turned to Bentow.

"Anything else you wanted to know?" he asked.

"Only one thing I wanted to be sure of. If there's a leak and the doors close, how long do they stay closed?"

"Twelve hours, as a matter of safety. The boiler lines are diverted as soon as three others can be slowed down and this boiler's output diverted to them."

"During that time, you say the blowers will be replacing the air in here," Bentow said. "Does the alarm keep on sounding until the concentration is down below one part in two billion?"

"Gosh, no!" grinned Ford. "We'd be out of our minds if it did. No—as soon as the door closes the alarm is shut off, except for light signals which indicate which station has the trouble. Unless, of course, the concentration continues to rise. Then Ikey sounds off again."

"I see," said Bentow, who had known it before but was glad of the final check. "One more thing—and this is just personal curiosity; don't answer me unless you want to. But why do you work here?"

Ford smiled, and his cool gaze pinioned Bentow. "I wouldn't really expect you to understand," he said quietly. "It's just that I found out very early that there is nothing that can destroy a human being but excess. Alcohol won't hurt you, drunkenness will. Work won't hurt you, exhaustion will. And so on through everything a man eats, thinks, drinks, and breathes.

"And there is such a thing as too much success and too much money," he went on. "You don't believe that, I know. I've worked all my life. I don't live a Spartan existence—that's an extreme—but I haven't let myself get soft. My company pension comes due soon, and it'll be enough. I'm getting rid of everything else. I don't need it. I have my home and my lab and a lot of things to interest me. That's all I want. But there are thousands of other people who want and need my surplus money; they can have it. It'll do them good and it could only harm me—like any excess."

"It really is true, then, that you're turning over everything you have to Providence?" Bentow questioned.

"That's right. Did Dorcas tell you?"

"Yes. But why Providence?"

Ford laughed. "I don't know why I tell you this. No one else knows. Providence is mine. I founded it."

BENTOW'S eyes popped, and Ford laughed again.

"But that must have taken millions!" Bentow gasped.

"I just had some good ideas." Ford's eyes speared into Bentow again. "I know what you're thinking. That money meant so much rich living, so much yachting, so much social climbing—not for me, Bentow. I'm a working man."

Bentow's eyes glowed strangely. "I think you're crazy."

Ford shrugged. "You would. You have never learned the meaning of 'enough'."

"Does Dorcas feel the same way you do?"

"She doesn't feel," said Auckland Ford positively. "Easy come, easy go—she's always been a happy, or slap-happy, child. Maybe some day she'll get a jolt big enough to give her some sense. I don't believe in jolting people who are close to me, personally. It's useless to talk sense to your intimates. They'll only listen to strangers." He shrugged. "Dorcas is *good*," he said. "Sooner or later, that will show up."

Bentow took the gun from his left jacket pocket. A corner of his mind appreciated the fact that his jacket now fell to its correct cut.

Ford said, in surprise, "That's mine!"

"Dorcas took me on an extensive tour of your laboratory," said Bentow. "These long evenings at home, when you're on the night shift—"

"That gun will never be good for anything," said Ford. "Not as a weapon, anyway. Industrially it might have some use—if anyone wants a tool that will penetrate fifty inches of molyb steel with a hole a thousandth of an inch in diameter."

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"What about this one?" Bentow drew the other, and the sartorial corner of his mind heaved a satisfied sigh.

"I don't deal in weapons," said Ford. "Can't say I'm crazy about the idea of your just picking these up."

"No one knows I've got them—not even Dorcas," said Bentow. "This one," he added persistently. "A paralysis device, isn't it?"

"That's what it turned out to be," said Ford glumly. "I was fooling with subsonics for anaesthetic purposes. I suppose you know the police now carry that one as standard equipment. Causes a temporary derangement of the motor centers. What the deuce are you doing with it?"

Bentow smiled. "Only this," he said, and pressed the thumb-stud.

Ford stood stiffly, almost as he always stood. But now his mouth opened slowly, his tongue protruded and began to oscillate violently. His long, narrow eyes widened until they were almost perfectly round. His hands curled, tensed, straightened, stiffened. He overbalanced slowly, like a tall tree just sawed through, fell to lean stiffly a moment against the bulkhead, and then jackknifed to the floor.

"I know you can hear me," said Bentow smugly, putting away the paralysis gun. "You just can't move. Don't worry, that will only last two or three minutes. I wish I could be here to see what the great Brain will do then. The place will be full of mercury vapor, and that so carefully designed hermetically sealed door will be closed. Pound against it all you wish—no one will hear you. The phone's outside, the door controls are outside,and no one will know you're here."

He paused, cocking his shining head to one side as if listening.

"Oh," he said, pretending the other had spoken. "You want to know why? Well. Mr. Brilliant Scientist, it seems that you are about to leave all of your considerable fortune to a thing called Providence, with the bland idea that I shall be able to support your dear daughter on my wages in the manner to which she has become accustomed. My dear Mr. Ford, I intend to do much better than that—with the money which she will now inherit!"

He still held the other gun. He walked over the trunk duct marked "HP" for "High Pressure" and fired twice. There was no sound—simply a line of blue light so fine it was almost invisible.

"Those," he said, putting the gun in his pocket, "will be attributed to pressure leakage. Because you were afraid that this thing would be used as a weapon, you have kept its performance characteristics secret, and I assure you that all of your records will be destroyed before I go on my honeymoon.

"I must go now." An ugly smirk was on his face. "I am sincerely sorry that I cannot stay to see what you do when you come out of the paralysis. I would, but I can't think of jeopardizing the health of your future, if post-mortem, son-in-law."

He waved his hand jauntily and stepped into the generator room. He called back, "What amuses me most in this dramatic situation is that you are being killed by two of your own inventions, in a plant which is possible because of a third. A happy suicide to you!"

HE STOOD tensely by the doorway. Turning, he pushed the button there. The light went out. Then he sprinted to the corner and down the generator room to the administrative corridor.

There he waited until there came a harrowing mechanical scream which went on and on and on. A red light flared over the door of the station he had just left, and its ponderous door slid shut with a clang. Through the clamor of the screecher he could hear the pound of running feet. He turned and sprinted up the corridor to his office. The light still burned there.

He opened the closet and took out his overcoat. With one arm into it, he went to the door which gave on to the general offices and opened it a crack. There were voices outside.

"A leak," someone said out there. It was old Zeitz, the night watchman. "Stay right here, Sam. There was a blowoff out Hanford oncet where they phonied up an alarm to get the guards outen the offices, so's they could steal secret files. You stay right here till I git back, an' grab anyone thet come in, no matter who."

"I got you," said a bass voice.

Peering around the door, Bentow could see the shadowy hulk of the younger guard, and knew immediately that his, Bentow's, kind of brains would be useless against that particular one hundred and ninety pounds.

Bentow shucked out of his coat and put it away. He was not going to go out into the generator room, with guards and techs converging on Condenser Station No. 48, and he

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couldn't leave while that big guard was out there. His office was soundproof; he would simply pretend to be working late until all of the excitement died away, or express profound regret about the whole thing if someone came in accidentally.

Not that anyone would. In a technological emergency, no one would dream of calling the public relations office, even during office hours.

He settled back into his swivel chair, and smiled.

A half an hour later he screamed when Auckland Ford tottered into his office.

Ford, with his long face flushed and his once-clear eyes shot with blood, smiled a ghastly smile, Bentow screamed again, tried to huddle away, upset his swivel chair and cowered in a sobbing heap in the corner.

Men poured in, to catch Ford as he fell, to snatch the sodden Bentow to his feet and hold him.

From a deep easy-chair, with solicitous technicians around him, Ford glared redly at Bentow. "Well, Bentow, did you hear it?" he said.

"Hear what?" quavered Bentow.

Jackson, the swarthy plant super, said, "He means the screecher, when it gave his code call."

"This office is soundproof," said Bentow. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Ford's breath took on a wheeze. Jackson said, "I'll tell you, Bentow. Ford doesn't want to go to the hospital until he knows you've been told what happened. Can's say I blame him." His lips curled. He went on, "He found himself locked in that cell with the vapor concentration mounting. He'd been knocked down by a paralyzer but—" awe entered his voice—"that didn't keep his brain from working. When he could move again he found himself in a real spot."

"I'd have written your name on the floor," rasped Ford at Bentow, "but I didn't have anything to write with. Not even a spanner would make an impression on the stuff."

"You rest easy," said a guard, with his hand on Ford's shoulder.

"Yeah, I'll tell it," said Jackson. He turned back to the sweating Bentow. "He tried to write on the floor, first of all, and lost minutes at it. When I *think* of it!" he exploded. "All of us milling around outside, and that door closed, and none of us dreaming that there might be anyone inside! The screecher giving the alarm, and then dying out, and all of us nodding at each other and saying, 'Well, we'll get to her at noon tomorrow.' And all the while he—"

He thumbed over his shoulder at Ford, who grinned weakly.

"The medicine chest," Ford whispered. "Only thing there was in the place." He laughed horribly. "I took a—" He began to cough.

JACKSON said again, "I'll tell it. We were about to go back to our stations when the screecher started up again. That meant only that the leak was getting ahead of the blowers, at first. But none of us had ever heard the screecher like that. Hinks here spotted it."

Hinks, the guard, nodded and, oddly, blushed. "It went *Awk. Awk-awk-awk. Awk.*"

His imitation of the alarm screecher was so startlingly accurate that every man in the room jumped. Hinks blushed again and tittered, pulled himself together and said.

"It done it again, and a third time, and all of a sudden I remembered that was Mr. Ford's code-call on the beeper."

"Very—" said Bentow, and then his voice failed him. He swallowed hard and tried again. "Very ingenious. What has that to do with me?"

"It was Ikey," said Ford from his chair. "Ikey's like a light meter. Hold one candle one foot away, the meter'll say one foot-candle. Hold twenty candles twenty feet away, it'll still say one foot candle." He ran out of breath.

"Yeah," said Jackson, "all Ikey knows is the concentration of mercury vapor in that little air space between the light and the cell. Mr. Ford took the thermometer—why they put a fever thermometer in all these local first-aid kits I'll never know, but they're standard—and he broke it and held a little pool of mercury smaller'n a dime under the beam of Ikey's light."

"Shielded it off with a piece of my shirt," whispered Ford. "As primitive as Indian smoke signals. The little bit of mercury that vaporizes at room temperature drove Ikey into hysterics when it was that close to the beam."

"I still don't see what this has to do with me," said Bentow.

"You will," snapped Jackson. "Mr. Ford told us what you said about killing him with his own inventions. Watch what happens

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to you when you run into the lie detector in court. He invented *that*, too!"

The door from the general offices opened. The guard-captain stood flatfooted and looked at every face in the room in one swift sweep. Then he pointed his finger at Bentow.

"His," he said tersely.

"I asked the captain to get the thumb-print from that push-button outside Station Number Forty-eight," Jackson explained, and match it if he could in the company files. It's yours, all right."

Bentow opened his mouth, put his hands to his face, and slumped down in a near faint.

"I think," said Ford harshly, "that my haywire kid Dorcas is going to get that jolt I was talking about." Then, oddly, he began to laugh. He laughed until Hinks nudged him anxiously.

"I'm all right," whispered Ford. "Maybe I'm delirious. I was just thinking about getting that message through to you fellows. Did you know I'm leaving everything I have to Providence?"

There was a bumble of approving excitement in the room.

"Providence," said Ford, "has had a lot of names at one time or another—a lot of 'em. D'you remember what the name of Jupiter's messenger was, Jackson?"

Jackson frowned.

"Uh—Hermes?"

"No, son. It was Mercury!"

Ford shook his head and laughed again.

Wonder Oddities

WHALES can be weighed without being removed from the water, according to the curator of fishes of the Smithsonian Institution. Given an instrument to determine their length and knowledge of their species, an expert can give you the correct tonnage. Various weight-length formulas have been worked out for the different types of large sea mammals and fish.

OLDEST preserved meat in the world, discovered not long ago in the great lignite pits of the Beisel valley in Germany is at least 50,000,000 years old. Microscopic examination of the tissue shows preservation of the finest details of the muscle structure. However, since it is fossilized, it is hardly fit for the twentieth-century dining room table.

NO SUPERMEN physically are scheduled to evolve from the present version of humanity, according to the index of the thyroid gland. The further any species develops along the evolutionary line, the larger becomes the built-in iodine plant. So it looks is if the man of the future will be fat of head, short on chin and bulging of eye.

DEVELOPMENT of perpetual motion in mechanical form seems as far away as ever. But perpetual motion exists, as it has always existed, in nature. Examination of very fine particles—such as carmine—in water, reveals under the microscope that all such particles are in a state of rapid, irregular and continuous movement. It is called the Brownian movement.

ETERNAL life or the next thing to it would be possible to humanity if we were able to maintain our blood pressure at a constant heat level of forty-five degrees, Fahrenheit. Under such conditions, according to the best scientific estimates, the average person should be able to stay alive for approximately nineteen hundred years.

REBORN seven times in the course of one existence is the gold-band skipper, a butterfly. Commencing as a near-microscopic egg, it is transformed six times in its progress toward adulthood, thus putting it several lives ahead of most other lepidoptera and approaching within two lives of the cat.

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ASSIGNMENT

Stannard was in trouble when his ship crashed on the one asylum for criminals left in the galaxy—but with the aid of the professor's daughter, he managed to put up a fight!

by WILLIAM

CHAPTER I

Crash Landing

THE *Snark* hit atmosphere, screaming, and Standard grimly set himself to fight it out with the fins. A half hour since he'd used what jets remained in action, and the gyros too, past all sane risk. He had a good approach course now, though—it was a shallow, almost infinitesimal slant toward the planet's surface—but normal landing-procedures were definitely out.

He saw seas and land and peninsulas below, so random landing would be unwise. He had to depend on the fins and the *Snark's* streamlining to gain some sort of control from the resistance of the air. He succeeded only in part.

The little ship bucked crazily. It jerked his head sidewise until he thought his neck would snap but he hung onto the levers. Then he realized that they were doing practically no good at all. The *Snark* bounced

Then dancers appeared, slim and graceful and shapely, and they had plainly studied

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on PASIK

a complete novelet

and the straps that held him in his chair dug into his flesh. Then the small space-car seemed to throw a fit.

It went spinning through some fleecy cirrus clouds a good four miles up, straightened out and skidded backwards, then spun and whirled at once and finally began to slow perceptibly and drop with obviously suicidal intent.

Then the tail went up and Stannard saw jungle below him, straight in front of the control room ports. The *Snark* seemed to decide that this was a good place to smash. It dived down with the evident purpose of splashing itself and Stannard over as much landscape as possible. At least, though, this was land. There was a sea not many miles away.

He let it dive to the last possible moment and then slammed in his jets. For one fleet-

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vicíphone records and learned the dances of humen beings—but they were Pasiki

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ing instant he wondered sardonically if all of them would fire again. The sabotage of his firing controls had been a thorough job.

But the *Snark* was consistent in its lunacy. The portside jets alone responded. The space-car made an erratic half-loop and for one instant pointed straight up. In that fraction of a second Stannard threw a full gyro-hold and kept her nose vertical despite the one-sided thrust.

The jets wouldn't hold her up. She sank, stern-first. Stannard almost relaxed. If the gyros seized now or the jets cut out—a trick they'd been doing for three days past—he was simply dead. He'd done everything there was to do.

He caught a fleeting glimpse of foliage rising past the side ports. Then jets sputtered erratically, he heard the beginning shriek of dry gyro-shafts, there was a crashing, then a violent bump, then a heaving, wrenching explosion. The control room split down the middle on either side of him, the whole scrap heap which was the *Snark* partly folded on itself like an accordion and partly billowed out like an expanding latex bubble—and there was a vast silence.

Stannard hung in the control seat with an expression of vast amazement on his face. The amazement was because he was alive. He didn't even seem to have any broken bones. But the *Snark* was not quite through. He heard a crackling, booming noise.

The fuel-store had caught. It might burn merely brightly or it might burn with the ravening ferocity of thermite or it might let go at any instant in a monstrous detonation which would blast everything up to half a mile away.

It was time to get away from there. Stannard broke loose the straps, pitched headlong and without dignity, scrambled through a gap in the plating and ran like the devil.

HE DODGED tree-trunks, panting, and came out on a patch of savannah just as the fuel blew. There was a sound like the end of all creation, a blast of air lifted him off his feet and hurtled him forward off the ground with his legs still making ridiculous running motions. He landed in a slough of mud. He fell hard. He went under. The mud tried enthusiastically to smother him.

He fought to the surface and cleared thick adhesive stuff from his mouth so that he could gasp in air. He cleared his eyes and nose. He floundered ashore to something solid, swept more mud from himself, saw squirming things wriggling frantically out of the stuff that still coated him—and began to swear.

Instants later he was out of his outer garments and ready for anything. But the squirming things were as anxious to get away from him as he was to avoid contact with them. They writhed and squirmed and inched themselves like measuring-worms back toward the mud. They were two or three inches long and disgustingly naked flesh. They fled. He heard tiny sucking sounds as they regained their normal habitat and scrambled into clayey seclusion again.

Then there was stillness once more. He looked about and listened. In ancient days there had been tales of castaways. They were very glamorous exciting stories. But this was something else. In the act of estimating his own situation he grew angry all over again at the sabotage which had brought it to pass, for the ruining of the task on which he had been engaged.

He fumbled at the mud which was his outer clothing. He pulled loose and scraped off the belt, which contained a heat unit that, on occasion, could serve as a weapon. He slung the belt about himself and scraped further at his clothes.

He listened from time to time. The mud was infinitely adhesive. Presently he surveyed the mud-slough. There was a small, languid stream which flowed into it. There was a fallen tree-trunk which spanned it at its narrowest. He went out on the trunk and scrubbed off the mud with flowing water.

Four or five more squirming things came frantically out and dropped into the water. His garments became clean. He flapped them violently and the water-droplets flew away. He put his clothes on again, dry.

Somehow he felt better, though this was no enviable situation. Aside from the absolute failure of the job he'd been on he was in a bad fix. This was one of the planets of the Bornik star-cluster and he thought it was Pasik but he was not sure.

The whole group had been surveyed, a couple of centuries before and all the stars were yellow dwarfs, the planets were approximately solar-family types and vegetation on this one had been green as seen from space. Green vegetation plus seas meant breathable atmosphere and not too impossible a climate.

This could be Pasik, if he'd identified the

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local sun correctly. But he wasn't sure even of that. This part of the galaxy wasn't much visited. Sometimes a hunting-party came through to land here and there and gather more or less improbable specimens.

There were races of low development on some of the planets and there was a vague commerce of sorts kept up by occasional traders. But the known facts about the planets were few. Men could live on them but few did. A castaway could survive but the odds against being picked up were so enormous that they were best expressed by zero.

A single castaway on a planet the size of Earth could escape notice even during a ninety-per-cent complete survey. When there was only one ship in years, which might touch only at one spot more or less at random, there was no chance at all.

So Stannard looked upon his life as a member of the human race as finished. Somebody else would have to take over his job.

In the stillness he heard the crackling of cooling metal sheets. There wouldn't be much to salvage from the *Snark* and what there was could wait. But still—

He moved back toward the site of the recent explosion. He came to trees bent outward from the blast. He went through them to stumps of trees snapped off by the explosion and piled in untidy windrows. He wormed through a passable place and saw the crater where the *Snark* had been.

There was literally nothing left but a hole in the ground. On one pile of shattered trees he saw a bit of torn plating. Caught among tree-stumps he saw a crumpled mass of metal. And that was all.

He managed to shrug. No stores, no tools, no food. Hopelessly isolated for all time—

Then he saw a movement across the clearing the explosion had made. Something glistened blackly among tree-branches. A thing came out of the tumbled, shattered trees. It carried a spear and it was about five feet high. It had a cylindrical body and glistening, jointed legs which looked mechanical.

It had two arms of nearly human size and two smaller, apparently specialized mandible-like upper arms and a head which was curiously humanoid without being in the least human. Another similar creature followed it, and another and another. There were thirty of them altogether. Some carried spears and others carried other weapons and several had bags containing mysterious objects slung over their shoulders.

They regarded the crater and made noises among themselves. Stannard froze. A man who stands motionless does not attract attention. This is true on all planets everywhere. Stannard stood still.

The sticklike men moved forward. Despite the angularity of their structure they moved gracefully. They peered into the crater where the fuel had blown a hole all of forty feet across. One of them pointed to the crumpled plating. More noises. One of them doubled up suddenly, and then was erect again. Others did the same.

They clustered around the crater and gesticulated to one another. Then, suddenly, they began to dance. It was an hilarious, unorganized, utterly gleeful dance. Stannard realized, blinking, that they knew exactly what the plating was.

They knew that a ship had crashed and blown itself to atoms and their doublings-up were laughter and the hopping and cavorting was the expression of exuberance that a creation of men had destroyed itself and—of course—apparently killed all the humans in it.

Then one of the stickmen saw Stannard. The dancing stopped instantly. All the stickmen—those with spears included—stared at him. They began to move toward him.

CHAPTER II

The Not-Quite-Humans

IT WAS preposterous. It was absurd. Stannard felt his flesh crawl as the litter carried him swiftly through a narrow lane in the jungle which seemed to be unending. The litter which carried him had been hastily improvised but it was comfortable.

Stickmen carried him swiftly, some running with the flexible litter-poles on their shoulders, some running behind. At least one or two had gone racing on before to carry the news. From time to time the unburdened ones pelted up level with Stannard's bearers and deftly took their places while the relieved ones fell back. And the one who spoke English trotted alongside Stannard and babbled ecstatically whenever Stannard glanced in his direction.

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"Pasiki have master!" he seemed to chortle: "Pasiki have man master to serve! All Pasiki love man master! All Pasiki glad to have master! Oh, master, we are happy to have master to serve!"

Stannard kept his face impassive. It did not make sense. That crazy zestful rejoicing dance about the scene of the *Snark's* explosion and now this babbling abasement—when the dancers first saw him they stopped short in their dance. They saw a man, alive, and a murmuring arose among them. Spears shifted.

Then a shrill voice called among the rest as they moved toward him. One came ahead. Twenty yards away he went down on hands and knees. The others stopped. The leader crawled to Stannard's very feet, and then abjectly lifted Stannard's foot and put it on his head. And he spoke—in English!

It was not speech from a throat somehow. It was actually the vibration of a diaphragm somewhere near where a man's throat would have been. But it formed English words. Now that same native babbled more English words, trotting swiftly beside the litter the others had made and brought for Stannard to ride in.

"Oh, master, such gladness! Pasiki do not know what to do without man master! Hundreds, thousands Pasiki serve with such gladness!"

Stannard said drily, "How much farther do we go?"

"Not far, master," chortled the English speaking one. "We have sent for man-style servants, for man-style food, for man-things man master will want. Oh, such gladness!"

Stannard again had a crawling sensation in the back of his neck. If he'd ever seen triumphant hate in his life it had been the dancing about the crater where the *Snark* had struck.

And surely, if these sticklike, these antlike men—Pasiki, they called themselves, which would mean that this was the planet Pasik, barely mentioned in the Space Directory as an earth-type planet, friendly inhabitants of grade 2B, type exoskeletal tympanate—surely if these creatures had wanted to kill him they could have done so with their spears. Stannard reflected vaguely on tales of local deities to whom sacrifice was made. They did not fit, either.

"Where'd you learn man talk?" he asked abruptly.

"Man master, master," babbled the Pasiki, skipping in seeming glee as he kept pace with the litter. "Man master had many Pasiki to serve him. All Pasiki love man master! Our man master died, master. Some Pasiki went to serve woman master but they come more gladness to serve man master."

"Woman?" said Stannard. "There are men and woman masters here?"

"One woman master," said the Pasiki in seeming bliss. "Eight—nine—ten man master, master. You make 'leven man master for Pasiki!"

The trail widened ahead. There was a sort of glade with thick, leafy stuff for a carpet in the place of grass. There was a tent set up there. Stannard wanted to rub his eyes. It was not a tent but a pavilion—a shelter erected on poles, shimmering like silk.

There was a carpet on the ground. There was a table. There was a couch. There was a chair. The table was loaded with fruits and great platters heaped with foodstuffs. There were even bottles with colored contents. There was a stream of black glistening figures running out of the farther side of the glade where the trail reëntered the jungle.

Each carried some object and every object was human. Stannard saw cushions, books, binoculars, pots and pans, silverware. He saw a sporting rifle being hustled out of the forest toward the pavilion. He saw clothing—all of a man's wardrobe carried piece by piece to be dumped at the back of the pavilion.

"Pasiki bring things for man master," chirruped the English speaking creature. "Everything our man master left, master. Not one thing lost! All for new man master."

Then Stannard stiffened. The things being brought out of the forest now were unbelievable. They looked like human bodies, except that they were carried with such lightness and such ease that they could not possibly be bodies. More, bodies would not be limp and boneless like that.

"Man-style servant suits, master," the skipping creature gloated. "Pasiki make master happy, master make Pasiki glad. You look! You see!"

AT SIGHT of the litter the creatures carrying the limp objects stopped short. And then Stannard's eyes popped wide. The things that looked like human bodies were actually suits, of a sort. Like diving suits—but their look was utterly different.

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The creatures who carried them put them hastily down. Then they struggled with them. They put them on. And suddenly, instead of glistening black articulated things that looked like ants or stick-insects, there were half a dozen startlingly human figures moving toward the pavilion.

When the litter stopped these oddities stood in amazing similitude of human servants to greet him. There was a figure which looked exactly like a butler out of an old book, complete with striped pants and vest. There was a valet. There were two footmen. There were two maids, similarly contrived.

They were incredibly convincing. Their flesh was lifelike. Their faces wore the reserved, detached expressions of perfect servants. Even their eyes moved and they had hands with fingers on them. The only thing that was not wholly lifelike was the fact that the garments on the figures had been moulded on them.

The disguises—uniforms, servant suits—were made of some extraordinarily flexible plastic, on the order of foamflex, and each contained a hollow interior into which one of the insectile Pasiki fitted.

With a stick creature inside the flexible creation stood erect and moved and looked human. Then the movements of the creature inside moved the outer shell as the movements of a man in a diving suit move his casing.

"Master," said the butler shape, "we have gladness! Welcome, master! You rest and eat, master?"

Stannard surreptitiously pinched himself. He got out of the litter. The food looked good and smelled good. The butler thing pulled back the chair. Stannard, his eyes a bit narrow, halted.

"Hm," he said suspiciously. "Did I see a rifle just now?"

An unintelligible sound. Then a glistening black creature darted from the back of the pavilion. It placed a rifle in the lifelike hands of a footman figure. The footman presented it to Stannard with an infinitely deferential bow. Stannard examined it closely. It seemed to be in perfect condition. He raised it and aimed at a tree-limb across the open space. He pulled trigger. There were the normal violent surge of energy and the regulation flare of deep purple flame. The branch flew apart with a burst of steam.

Stannard lowered the rifle. It was a weapon, all right, and in good working order. If these creatures had intended to kill him after some extraordinary hokus-pokus they wouldn't have given him a rifle with which he could kill scores of them!

"All right," he said grimly. "I guess this is straight. I'll have lunch. Then what?"

"Master's house waits," said the butler thing obsequiously. "If master wishes, he goes there. Or Pasiki make him new house here. Or anywhere. Anywhere master desires, Pasiki will do with gladness!"

Stannard sat down. The chair edged forward exactly right as he seated himself. A footman served him. There were two footmen and two maidservants and the butler. Their service was abjectly eager. It was such service as a sultan might have.

He could not reach for anything but it was instantly placed before him. He could hardly look at anything but it was offered him. And there were glasses filled and waiting. There were wines and Earth whiskey and a bubbling vintage of infinitely alluring aroma. He tasted one or two of the liquids cagily.

They were a bit too insidious. He had something to think about. He began to have a queer so-far-unjustified hunch that this distinctly novel experience had something to do with the job he'd had on hand when he was shipwrecked.

"You wish music, master?" asked the butler, deferentially.

"Eh? Oh, surely," said Stannard, abstractedly.

His seat did not give him a view of the trail from which a file of black creatures still trotted, bringing burdens. Now he saw an orchestra file before him. It looked real. It had uniforms. He suddenly recognized it—a name band which had made visiphone records that ten years before, had caught the fancy of half the galaxy.

Servant suits—plastic shapes into which the Pasiki slid themselves—reproduced the builds and faces of the original musicians. There were instruments. Music began. It was an excellent imitation of a visiphone record but after a moment Stannard noted that the movements of the instrumentalists did not match the music.

The sound did not come from the instruments then, but from that diaphragm each of the Pasiki possessed and which vibrated to make speech or sound. It was somehow shocking to realize it.

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Then dancers appeared and Stannard almost started up. They were slim and graceful and shapely, and they had plainly studied visiphone records and learned the dances of human beings. But they were Pasiki, clothed in plastic suit-masks. Still, they were astonishingly like lissome human girls in a minimum of costume, dancing to sultry impassioned music.

But all this happened in bright sunshine and Stannard watched from a pavilion in a small clearing, surrounded by strange trees with lenticular leaves. And all about the clearing there were the black glistening bodies of the Pasiki, watching Stannard. It was oddly wrong.

Even the whirling, gracefully alluring figures of the dancers were foamflex, or something similar and inside each there was another glistening black body, faithfully making a marionette of itself for the diversion of the man who was—they said—their master.

Somehow, Stannard felt a little bit sick.

CHAPTER III

Lay That Blaster Down!

THE days on Pasik were twenty-two hours long and it was on the third day that Stannard saw the girl. There were times in between when he doubted his sanity and the hunch that said all this connected somehow with the job he'd had on hand when *Snark* broke down.

There were other times when the temptation to complacent acceptance of his situation and the abandonment of his task was very strong. And there were occasions on which he wanted to smash something out of pure perversity.

The Pasiki were irritating. There is something about abject submissiveness which revolts a normal man and anyhow Stannard could not forget the glee these same Pasiki had shown when they found a human ship had been destroyed—presumably with all its occupants.

The fact that now the Pasiki tended to greet Stannard's rising with songs and cheers and that they raptly assured him each lightest word was inspired and infinite wisdom and that they showed an enormous ingenuity in displaying the most passionate adoration—these things did not jibe. From time to time, at the most unlikely moments, he felt a crawling sensation at the back of his neck.

On the third morning, as he waked, the butler form hovered about his bed. The bed, like the palace to which he had been conducted, was shoddy and elaborate and falsely elegant. The building had plainly been constructed by the Pasiki under orders from a human being who considered that visiphone records portrayed the everyday life of aristocrats.

"Master," said the butler thing obsequiously, "man master comes to see you. In two hours."

Stannard rolled out of bed. The butler masked Pasiki helped him to dress. Stannard wore the garments in which he had been wrecked including his belt. As he fastened it, the butler handed him another belt. It contained two hand-blasters in holsters.

"Why weapons?" asked Stannard. "If I'm to have a visitor—"

"Man masters, master," said the butler thing blandly, "always wear weapons to see each other."

He bowed to withdraw.

"But why?" demanded Stannard. "Custom or what?"

"Sometimes they kill," said the butler as if piously regretful. "It is not for Pasiki to understand, master. The master who was here before was killed by another master."

There was a mound, not far from this place, where a human grave was devotedly kept covered with blossoms of a lurid purple. Stannard had been told that it was the grave of his predecessor. But he had gathered an impression of the unknown—from his ideas of luxurious living—which had blunted his curiosity.

He had no morbid interest in the man who'd had all the foam suits of dancing-girl shapes made so that insectile Pasiki could dance for him in the appearance of scantily clad human girls.

Stannard said, "How'd the killing come about?"

"Who knows, master? They drank together and the other master killed our master. You can ask, master, when he comes."

"The same killer's to be my visitor, eh?" said Stannard. "And what happened after the killing?"

"He went away, master. He did not want

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our master's possessions."

"How about the law?"

The butler thing said blankly, "Law, master?"

"I see," said Stannard grimly. "Humans are above the law to Pasiki. And there are too few to make laws for themselves. But didn't you Pasiki do anything at all when your master was killed?"

"We asked what the other master wished to do, master," said the butler shape. "We wished to serve him. But he told us to go to the devil. Then he would not tell us how to do that thing and laughed as he went away."

"I see," said Stannard.

HE BUCKLED on the extra belt with two blasters. The Pasiki served men, apparently any man would do. There was no feeling of loyalty to an individual. One man killed another man and the Pasiki, who had been joyous slaves to the murdered man, promptly offered themselves as joyous slaves to the murderer.

It was somehow convincing. It looked quite a lot as if this fitted into Stannard's hunch about a connection between Pasik and his job. But there was no mention of a woman master yet. He'd almost forgotten the one mention of her that he'd heard.

He was at breakfast when, utterly without warning, she came into the room. Her entrance was partly hidden by the butler mask with its shiny skinned occupant, who was serving Stannard his breakfast with elaborate ceremony.

Stannard saw the feminine form, but he had seen enough foam flexservants. This one he had not seen before but he was not interested. He spooned out a morsel of a curious pink-fleshed fruit and put it to his lips. Then the butler thing moved obsequiously aside and bowed.

"Welcome!" said the butler thing profoundly. "Welcome to woman master! Pasiki have gladness!"

Stannard looked up blankly. The girl faced him across the table and she had a blaster in her hand. It pointed straight at Stannard.

"Good morning," said the girl in a taut voice. "I'd like to know something about you, please. Of course I'd better kill you out of hand, but I'd like to be fair."

Stannard blinked. His eyes went to the blaster, to her face. He suddenly noted that her costume was not a part of her body. It was not moulded on. It had been donned.

"You—you're human!" he said blankly.

"Quite," said the girl. She was very pale. "And my Pasiki have let slip you were planning to pay me a visit, so I thought I'd visit first. Don't move, please! I'm going to take your blasters."

She moved around the table, keeping him covered. The human seeming servants skipped agilely out of her way. She ignored them. Stannard sat still, his hands on the table.

"Don't move!" she repeated fiercely, "I've no reason not to shoot!"

She was behind him. The blaster muzzle touched the back of his neck. It pressed. Hard. She bent forward and reached around him to loosen the belt which held his weapons. He felt the warmth of her breath.

"Be still!" she commanded. But he caught the note of strain which was almost hysteria in her voice. "Keep still!"

The pressure of the blaster muzzle was almost savage against his neck. Then he turned his head. Because of the pressure, the blaster muzzle slid off and past his cheek.

It flared as she desperately pulled the trigger.

A part of the opposite wall spurted intolerable flame. And then the girl was in his arms, fighting desperately, and he was twisting the blaster from her fingers. Flames roared from the ceiling as the blaster flashed again. The room filled with stinking smoke.

Then he had the weapon away from her. He stepped back, breathing fast. He released her.

"I'd rather not be killed this morning," he told her. "More especially, not for a Pasiki holiday!"

He gestured angrily about him. The foam figures—so incredibly convincing at any one glance—stared avidly at the picture of conflict between human beings. Other Pasiki—hordes of black, shining, inhuman shapes—pressed to look zestfully in through doors and windows.

"I've more than a hunch that they hate humans," he said wratfully. "It would be only to be expected that they'd lie to you if it would make you try to kill me, perhaps to me to get me killed. But—is everybody here fooled by it? If my presence here's annoying I'll be delighted to leave! I didn't come here on purpose! These creatures aren't my idea of congenial society!"

He glowered at her. Then he turned and

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snarled at the Pasiki in servant suits and otherwise, who watched hopefully for a killing.

"Get the heck away from here!" he rasped.

OBSEQUIOUSLY the servants retired. The staring, inhuman faces outside vanished. Stannard tossed the girl's blaster contemptuously on the table.

"Sit down!" he said sourly. "I'll be glad to tell you anything you want to know, especially if you'll tell me a few things!"

The girl panted, staring at him as if she did not believe what she had seen and heard.

"You—let me go!" she said, as if stunned. "You really let me—go!"

Stannard went back to the pink fleshed fruit.

"Why not? I've been here for—" he counted up "This is my third day. I was in a space-car headed from Billem to Sooris. I was alone. I'd had some repairs made in Billem and they were badly done.

"Whether, on purpose or not some fool soldered the firing control junctions instead of flash-welding them, and the vibration broke them loose. I landed here with four jets firing out of eighteen, all of them on one side. My gyros burned out too, trying to hold me on course. I hit out of control, jumped, and ran away before the fuel blew.

"I came back to find Pasiki dancing joyously about the crater my ship had made and then they fawned on me and said they loved me to death. They've been repeating that song ever since but I doubt their sincerity. I would like to get away from this planet. It isn't my idea of a sane or a wholesome atmosphere. Now, what else do you want to know?"

Her face worked suddenly.

"If—if that's true," she said unsteadily, "that's enough! If you were, really shipwrecked and didn't—come here like the others—"

He raised his eyebrows but his unreasonable hunch grew stronger. She was trembling. There was enormous relief in her voice.

"Sit down and have breakfast," he suggested. "By the way. I wasn't told you were coming. I guess that that was to give you an extra chance to kill me. I have been told that I'm to have a man visitor. Is he likely to have—ah—murderous intentions too?"

She looked scared.

"That would be Mr. Brent. He's the nearest. Y-yes. He'll probably kill you. And—" Then she said desperately, "May I have my blaster back, please? Please! If he's coming I'll need it! But together we should be able to kill him instead."

CHAPTER IV

The Pasik Story

HER name, she said, was Jan Casin, and she had been on Pasik for ten years—since she was a small child. The Hill Foundation had sent her father to the planet as a one man scientific expedition. The Space Directory said that the local intelligent race was friendly to humans and there seemed to be no danger. But the Space Directory did not know of the later history of Pasik.

In the first century after its discovery it had been visited only twice, once by a survey ship which noted the essentials still printed in the Directory and once by one of the pioneer Bible reading merchant spacemen. He found no heavy metals or radioactives, reported the natives as friendly benighted and passed on to other scenes.

But a long while later—and this was *not* reported to the Space Patrol and hence never got into the Directory—the situation of the aborigines changed. A trader of a new sort landed. He was a typical trader of the later time, half merchant and two-thirds pirate when he dared.

The Pasiki, he discovered, had gemstones highly valued for technical uses. The trader bargained for them. But he and his crew were contemptuous of the sticklike, insectiform natives. The men were overbearing and rapacious. When the Pasiki grew resentful, the traders seized a number of them and threatened to kill them unless they were ransomed for a full cargo of gemstones.

The Pasiki, in turn, managed to seize some members of the trader's crew for hostages. The trader's crew, enraged, blasted a Pasiki town. The Pasiki promptly killed the hostages. The trader departed, swearing vengeance.

Later the trader returned with five other trading ships. The Pasiki were furiously warned of wrath to come unless they made complete submission. They defied the six

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ships. And the ships set about a methodical, murderous slaughter.

Every town and every village was blasted. Pasiki by millions must have been killed. The gemstones wanted by the traders could be recovered from the ashes of blasted towns, and doubtless were.

And then the six ships set up fan beams—already illegal for any but Space Patrol ships to possess—and made gigantic round-ups of the survivors, driving them ahead of the curtains of agony until more thousands died of exhaustion and until the sobbing beaten remnant had lost all spirit and all hope.

When the six ships left the few survivors of the last enormity had been subdued as no race was ever subdued before. They had sworn terrible oaths for themselves and their descendants until the end of time.

They were the slaves of men. They were vermin under the feet of men. They would dig up the gemstones men craved and give them as tribute forever and ever and ever. And they were passionately resigned to it.

For thirty full years mine-slavery was their function. Then the gemstones lost their value because it became possible to crystallize carbon in any size and quantity wanted anywhere. There had never been many humans on Pasiki at any time and the Space Patrol had carefully been kept in ignorance of events there.

But when the gemstones lost value most humans left. Those who left, however, kept the secret of a planet to which any man could retire when troubles were close upon him and those who remained stayed on because they were wanted too badly by the Patrol to find safety anywhere else.

They turned the submissive Pasiki into domestic slaves. They built palaces and lived as kings over the scuttling little people. Before they died off they were joined by others, some their late comrades of the mining days and some badly wanted men who could pay lavishly for sanctuary.

Pasiki became an exclusive haven for the very cream of the aristocracy of crime. There was no law. There was no check upon anything any man chose to do. The Pasiki had lost the spirit to revolt. They abased themselves before any human, obeyed any order in blindly terrified haste.

Sometimes there were as many as forty or fifty retired criminals on the planet, living in infinite self-indulgence. But the death-rate was high. No man who was never crossed by any slave would submit to being crossed by his fellows. And the men were ruthless to begin with.

They killed each other in quarrels. They assassinated each other for fancied slights. They carried on insane, lethal, personal feuds. But none ever left the planet on the one seedy space-vessel which sometimes stopped by either to bring another fugitive or to bring second grade merchandise to exchange for the *dhassa* nuts and other produce still worth shipping, which the Pasiki gathered for their masters.

THE girl Jan Casin told this to Stannard, keeping her hand close to the blaster he had returned to her after she'd failed to kill him. She listened intently as she talked, but she was not so much afraid of Stannard now. Among the retired criminals on Pasik there was one named Brent. He'd heard of her presence as a child of course.

The Pasiki had an uncanny intelligence system akin to telepathy and everything that went on anywhere was known everywhere at once. They told Brent of Jan, then merely a child. He went to see her, playing with dolls, and told her father amusedly that he would claim her when she grew old enough.

"And he had Pasiki watching," said Jan, uneasily. "When the Foundation ship came with supplies for us he knew it first. He lured us away from home with a message and he met the ship and told them that he was a planter and that I'd died six months after landing and Father a little later. So the ship went away and never came back again."

She stopped and listened.

"I think someone's coming, judging by the way the Pasiki sound talking to each other. Mr. Brent killed my father when I was sixteen. He meant to take me but I managed to get away. I made the Pasiki help me, of course, but they wouldn't keep a secret from any human who ordered them to talk."

"That made things difficult," commented Stannard. He listened too.

"It did," said Jan briefly. She looked at Stannard with level eyes. "But I managed! Pasiki are the slaves of any human being who gives them commands. So I used them. I had bearers. I had food. I even had watchmen to warn me. And they'll never harm a human, so I was safe from them.

"They wouldn't try to catch me for their masters, because I could always order them

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to let me go. I could only be caught by a human being in person and they—well, they get soft with slaves to wait on them all the time."

"I see," said Stannard.

"But I got tired of running away!" said the girl fiercely. "And I had no more books to read! I came back to my father's house to get books! Then my Pasiki warned me that you had come. They said a man master was coming after me. I decided to come to you first. I rather expected to kill you. I was tired of running away!"

"Natural enough," said Stannard. He cocked his ear, and thoughtfully drew one of two blasters. He made a fine adjustment at its muzzle. He put it on the table before him. The girl watched, and he went on in a natural voice, "I think I know something about a criminal named Brent. Quite a spectacular case, nine or ten years ago. Piracy."

They were quite alone in the dining hall. It was a huge space, thirty feet by sixty or more, with huge windows and decorative moulded pilasters and an ornate ceiling. It would have made a good setting for a visiphone record production.

Outside there was the murmuring of Pasiki voices. They had an extraordinary range, as was to be expected from the fact that they were produced by vibrating diaphragms instead of vocal chords.

Jan said in a low one, "He's here. I can tell by the Pasiki."

Stannard nodded. Without lowering his voice he said, "It seems to me that I remember the affair. He'd a trading ship and somehow he got arms for it. A tramp ship carried a colony to Verus and he laid aboard an hour after the landing. He beamed the men, carried off the women and, as I recall it, sold the tramp ship to a missionary society in the next star cluster. His picture's on the refresher reel every spaceport guard has to watch all over again every month."

Under his breath he said, "Talk naturally. If he hears conversation—"

But that was unnecessary. A bulky swaggering figure stepped inside the far door. Behind it came a smaller shape carrying a cloak. The manner of the smaller form was abject, like that of all Pasiki servants in foam suits.

STANNARD nodded detachedly: "Brent, eh? How do you do? You know Miss Casin?"

The bulky figure deliberately drew a blaster.

"I wish you wouldn't do that!" said Stannard. "I've something I'd like to say before the shooting starts. After all, Miss Casin—"

The bulky figure raised the blaster. There was a sudden spouting of steam from the heaped-up piles of fruit on the table before Stannard. But there was no corresponding purplish flare from the blaster the bloated figure held. Instead, flame and smoke billowed out from the cloak on the arm of the smaller figure. There was a crackling explosion and the smaller figure cast down a smoking blaster and cursed horribly.

"You," said Stannard coldly to the bulky form," drop that blaster and get out of that servant-suit!"

The huge form said obsequiously, "Much gladness, master."

The larger figure split improbably down the back and a skinny shining black shape came out of the limpness which collapsed to the floor.

"Get out!" snapped Stannard. The insect-like stickman fled. Stannard turned cold eyes upon the rows of unhuman heads that again peered eargerly in the window. They vanished a second time. He turned back to the cursing man who was nursing a scorched hand and arm.

"Amusing, eh?" said Stannard coldly. "You send a Pasiki on before you in foam suit. He makes a threatening gesture. The man you intend to kill watches him and goes for his gun. And you blast him! Highly diverting! The trouble here was that I knew your name and something of what you looked like. Elementary, eh? Would you mind telling me why you intended to kill me?"

The swearing figure watched him with eyes that rage and pain made beastly.

"*Her!*" he snarled.

Stannard considered a moment. Small tendrils of steam still rose from the mound of fruit before him on the table. He'd adjusted his blaster to a pencil-beam for accuracy and fired through the fruit which had hidden his hand as he aimed the blaster and fired. Now he thoughtfully readjusted the muzzle to utility-size blast. It would lessen the range a little but fine shooting is not usually called for when a blaster comes into play.

"Hmmmm," said Stannard detachedly. "You've had her in your mind a long time.

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She's the only woman on the planet. But why the haste to murder me?" Then he nodded. "I see! Pasiki telepathy. Everybody else knows she came back to her father's house too. Are they making plans?"

"Blast 'em!" snarled the wizened figure of Brent. "They're all on the way here!"

"So you thought you'd get rid of me as a possible rival first," agreed Stannard. "Hm . . . There should be some interesting fighting if we stayed here. Rather messy though. I think I'll urge Miss Casin to return to a wandering life. But you—"

He turned his eyes to Jan.

"He murdered your father," he commented drily, "and you more or less intended to kill me just because I was a man. Now's your chance. Why don't you blow his head off?"

CHAPTER V

The Long Flight

THE picture of their progress was quite incredible. All about was darkness, the darkness of pure jungle. On either side were the slender tree-trunks, which were typical of the taller growths on Pasik. From time to time a thread of sky was visible overhead, thickly thronged with stars. Ahead there were torches.

Little glistening bodied Pasiki ran on ahead, creating a shrill uproar to warn the carnivores of the jungle to draw aside. Behind them ran spear bearing Pasiki, hating humans with all the passion a living creature can feel, yet prepared to battle to the death —against beasts only—in their defense.

Then came the litter. Pairs of thirty-foot, limber poles reached out before and behind, and fifty of the unhuman creatures trotted swiftly with their burden. Among so many the weight was not great and a minor horde of yet other Pasiki followed with various objects carried for the service of the humans. There were extra bearers to relieve the litter carriers from time to time.

The litter itself was like a rather wide easy chair in which two people—Stannard and Jan—fitted not uncomfortably, though a definite physical contact could not be avoided. Because of the springiness of the carrying poles the feeling of motion was rather soothing than otherwise. Stannard smoked reflectively.

"Somehow," he said, "I feel rather silly being carried like this. I don't like the idea of slaves or servants anyhow. And intelligent creatures shouldn't be beasts of burden!"

The girl, Jan, said restlessly, "I'm used to it. I certainly couldn't have kept away from Mr. Brent and the others on my own feet!"

The litter went on and on. Presently Jan spoke again, again restlessly. "I don't understand why I didn't kill Mr. Brent. Or why you didn't. My father, of course, wouldn't have killed anybody unless—Of course he'd have fought for me! But he didn't get a chance. Mr. Brent murdered him."

Stannard grinned in the darkness. "I wouldn't have let you actually kill Brent. But I wasn't sure you'd told me the truth about yourself. I thought you had but I wasn't sure. Now I am."

She seemed to puzzle over it without result. Then she said, "What are you planning?"

"First, to get away from more fighting," said Stannard. "I've a rather good reason for wanting not to kill off all the other men on Pasik. It wouldn't make a tidy job."

He felt her turning in the seat beside him as if to try to see his face in the darkness.

"We'll get away," she assured him. "With the two of us to give orders and fresh Pasiki for bearers as often as we need them we can travel night and day."

"And," he agreed, "not trusting each other, the other men can't work together. I'd guess we're making ten miles an hour. That's two-forty—no, two hundred and twenty miles a Pasik day. I've a notion most of the others don't travel much. Right?"

"They've nothing to gain," said Jan. By her tone he knew she was frowning. "The Pasiki bring them everything they want. Of course if they knew I'd settled down somewhere and they thought I'd gotten careless—" He felt her stir uneasily.

"But I mean—you must have some idea of what you intend to do! I think that between us we could make—we could make ourselves safe. But of course, sooner or later the ship will come with other men or maybe just supplies the Pasiki can't make. If—other men come, m-maybe we could kill them too."

Stannard was silent.

"Not that I'd want to!" she added hastily. "I didn't even try to kill Mr. Brent! But they'd try to kill you because I'm with you!"

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Stannard chuckled.

"I'm *not* bloodthirsty!" she insisted. "It's just that I—I want to be safe! I want—" she said desperately "—I want to know what you plan for always!"

He did not answer for a moment and suddenly she put her hands before her face in the darkness.

Then Stannard said gently, "You've been here ten years, since you were a child. You've never really talked to another woman. You've never seen a man you weren't afraid of—and with reason. Now you aren't afraid of me. So naturally you want to be sure you won't be left alone to be afraid again. That's it, isn't it?"

There was a long pause while the insect-like runners trotted swiftly through the darkness with a shrill and torchlit clamor going on before. The flamelight glittered on the chitinous forms of the Pasiki.

JAN gulped and said in a muffled, unsteady voice, "P-partly, that's it. But I —guess I don't know how to act like a girl." She sobbed suddenly. "I just don't know how! I've read books about men and girls and they were so different from here—I never could imagine myself acting that way!"

"I assure you," said Stannard, amusedly, "you're acting as femininely as any woman in the Galaxy could act! Anyhow, here's part of what you want to know. First, I'm going to stay right with you. Yes. Second, I'm going to contrive a way for us to be reasonably safe without having to kill off all the other men on Pasik. I've a reason for that. And third, I'm going to try to get the two of us away from Pasik."

"Leave Pasik?" she asked unbelievingly. "How could we? Only one ship ever comes here and it certainly wouldn't take us away! Why, if we got away and told about the men who hide here from the Space Patrol—"

"Maybe," said Stannard, "instead of having the ship take us, we'll take the ship. If—hm—if you can draw a map for me of a few hundred miles round about—the sea-coast especially—and if it looks all right and the Pasiki don't know much about boats and we have a little luck, I think we can get away."

"I've traveled more than anybody," said Jan quickly. "I can draw you a map! Surely! And the Pasiki don't make anything but rafts. They used too, but since they've been slaves they don't bother. I doubt if they remember how."

"Then I can almost promise you to get you away from Pasik," he told her. "I'd be pretty inefficient, with the training I've had, if I couldn't! And meanwhile, don't worry! I'll be right with you for just as long as you want me to be!"

"That's—that will be for always," she said with a little, quick in drawing of breath. "For *always!* You promise?"

He nodded but his thoughts were sardonic. He was the first man since her father had been murdered whom she hadn't feared. She had never talked to another woman. In the book sense she was educated but by ordinary standards she was utterly unsophisticated. She had full awareness of the bestiality of which men are capable. But her feeling of security was so new and so overwhelming that there could be no limit to her confidence in him.

It wouldn't be easy to justify that confidence. For a beginning he'd have to rouse the men to whom Pasik was paradise and make them desperate to destroy him. For another he'd have to take action the Pasiki could not know about nor understand.

He would need to create a complete surprise despite the Pasiki telepathy which spread news incredible distances in no time at all and at the end he'd have to risk his life and Jan's on a throw of pitch and toss.

It would be much easier to compromise and make a secure haven for Jan and himself and live out the rest of his life with multitudes of abject slaves to serve them. Jan would think that only natural.

But there was the job he had to do, the job which the wrecking of the *Snark* had interrupted.

The litter went swiftly along the trail. Something roared in the jungle to the right. Stannard had no faintest idea what it could be but the Pasiki trotted on. Then Jan stirred beside him.

"In—in books," she said rather breathlessly, "I've read about people who were going to—be with each other always and—were very glad. M-may I ask you something?"

"Why not?" asked Stannard.

"W-would you say that we are—engaged?" asked Jan shakily.

He marveled at the ways of woman but he said gravely, "Why—we seem to be. If you wish. Yes."

"And it's for always?"

"Unless you want to break the engage-

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ment," he said, amused.

"I wouldn't do that!" she said quickly. "Oh, I wouldn't do that! But in the b-books I've read—" She stammered a little. "S-sometimes they called each other—each other—darling and they kissed each other. I wondered—"

He felt a little wrench at his heart. But he put his arm about her shoulders and bent over her upturned face. A moment later he said rather huskily, *"Darling!"*

The odd thing was that he meant it.

The litter raced on through the jungle. Insect shaped Pasiki trotted swiftly. Torches raced ahead and a high-pitched tumult which warned all the creatures of the wilderness to clear the way. A wavering thread of star speckled sky wound overhead. Small articulated figures with shell-skins on which the starlight glittered ran up and relieved the bearers of the litter and it went on without a pause. A roaring in the dense forest fell behind. The two in the litter rode quietly, side by side.

A long time later Jan sighed a little, looking wide-eyed at the stars. "I like being engaged. It's nice!"

"And how many hours ago was it that you had a blaster at the back of my neck?" asked Stannard drily. "In fact, if you remember, you pulled the trigger."

Jan said ruefully, "Wasn't I silly, darling! I was too stupid for words!"

But Stannard reflected that he wasn't at all sure.

CHAPTER VI

Counter Attack

THEY followed almost a ritual in their flight. The trails of the Pasiki were numerous and well traveled, with many branchings. But in three days and nights of journeying not one dwelling and certainly no village or city of the stickmen became visible. Before nightfall, each night, Stannard summoned the special Pasiki who invariably trotted beside the litter and as invariably was capable of human speech.

"We will want bearers to carry us through the night," he commanded. "Send messengers that they meet us."

"Yes, master!" chirruped the stickman as if in ecstasy. "Much gladness for Pasiki to serve man master!"

Then glistening skinned figures darted on ahead and were lost to sight in the winding jungle trail. And presently there was a restless, glittering small horde of Pasiki-waiting and the bearers who had brought the litter so far surrendered it and the new bearers went on.

When night fell there were torches flaring before, and the shrill clamor to drive away beasts. Stannard and Jan continued to move away from the neighborhood of the other humans present on the planet.

Then, when dawn showed greenish in the east, Stannard or Jan called again to the new runner beside the litter and commanded a message to be sent ahead to command yet other, fresher bearers for the litter. And presently there was another shifting mass of shiny insectlike creatures waiting to relieve this group.

Jan pointed out sagely that it was not only merciful but wise, because no bearers grew exhausted, and greater speed was possible. Three times already close pursuit by Brent or his fellows had failed because she commanded fresh bearers to carry her on while the men ceased to think of their slaves as requiring even the consideration of lower animals. Brent once had driven a party of worn-out Pasiki until half of them died of exhaustion. But they did not revolt.

"On the other hand," said Stannard grimly, "I doubt that they feel grateful to us for acting differently."

He did not like the Pasiki. Their abasement, their servility, their shrill cries of adulation—when he knew that they hated him and all his kind—alone would have made him dislike them. But he could not help despising them for the fact that they had kept their race alive, as slaves, rather than die as free creatures. It was that personal dislike which made him able to make use of them as he needed.

Riding in the litter was wearing. For the first twenty-four hours they went on without a pause. Their route was roughly due north. The second twenty-four they alighted from time to time to stretch their legs and to eat. They began to veer eastward.

In between they talked—and Stannard absorbed from Jan every item of information she possessed about the planet and its products and its people and its geography—and at the night Jan dozed in the half-reclining

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seat with her head on Stannard's shoulder, while he watched.

And then he dozed as well as he could while she stayed awake. He made sure that they traveled close to the shore of a great bay she had sketched on a map she drew for him. Once he waked to find her holding his head tenderly in her arms while she smiled down at him.

He flushed and she said defensively, "We're engaged, aren't we?"

She had acquired an absolute unquestioning confidence in him. When, his plans mature, he began to demand metal objects from the Pasiki, she phrased the commands for him so they would be best understood.

Once he took a copper pan and cut an elaborate form from it with the heat unit in his belt. He commanded that fifty duplicates of the arbitrary form be made and sent after them. Then he made other and smaller items—bits of some cryptic device that no Pasiki could understand but which they could make the separate parts for.

He demanded samples of Pasiki iron pots and chose a special shape and size and commanded fifty specimens to be sent after him. And Pasiki, in the hidden cities and workshops which they prayed no human would ever enter, labored to produce the parts required.

On the fourth day—they had passed around the inland end of the bay they guided themselves by—he demanded specific news of those who might have pursued. The running leader beside the litter told him, skipping as if with joy at the telling, that Brent had returned to his own palace in great rage and that two other men had essayed pursuit—not for revenge upon Stannard but for possession of Jan—but had given up the effort after one day's journey on learning that the two fugitives traveled day and night.

ON THE fifth day Stannard called a halt to journeying. Their flight had been around the head of the great bay and down its eastern shore until they were almost opposite their starting point. But they were nearly a thousand miles by land travel from anyone who could wish to injure them, and the Pasiki would warn them of any planned expedition against them.

Stannard chose a home site overlooking the waters of the bay whose farther shore was below the horizon. He commanded a cottage to be built. No palace but a tiny place of two rooms, barely thirty feet from end to end.

All this, he knew, the Pasiki would duly tell to the other men a thousand miles away by land. But Stannard was very particular about the roof of his house. It was round and flat and pointed at both ends, and very strongly built. The house had an awning before it, under which he and Jan dined in state, and there was a flagstaff on which a flag would doubtless be flown at some future date.

When the house was finished—and he had had the roof made completely strong and water-tight—he began the assembling of the devices whose component parts he had commanded to be made. He assembled them in secret with none of the Pasiki able to examine any one.

As he finished them he welded their covers tight with the heat-unit from his belt. Jan gravely kept herself informed of all the telepathic information their Pasiki could give them of the doings of the men they had left behind.

Stannard had not expected action so soon but it was only twelve days after Jan's first encounter with Stannard, only fifteen after his arrival on Pasik, that important information arrived. Jan went wide-eyed to Stannard. A space-ship was expected.

The sheds in which *dhassa* nuts—a source of organic oils used in perfume synthesis—were stored against the coming of the trading ship were nearly full. The landing field which served as a spaceport had been ordered cleared of new growth. The one ship trading to Pasik was expected to land within days.

At that moment, obviously, Stannard and Jan were as helpless against the contented inhabitants of Pasik as those men were against them. They were separated by nearly a thousand miles by land, for security, round a great bay. They could not return without full warning of their coming by the Pasiki's telepathic intelligence system. They could do nothing if they returned.

Ten men against Stannard—all warned and eager to burn him down for the seizure of Jan—would be only part of the odds. There would also be the crew of the trader, as definitely Stannard's enemies and Jan's pursuers as anybody else.

There was absolutely nothing that they could do without the Pasiki knowing all

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about it and everything the Pasiki knew their enemies knew. They were plainly helpless.

But on the very day that—as it turned out—the trading ship landed Stannard lined up fifty of the Pasiki in a row. He had them come one by one to the house with the curiously-shaped roof. He gave each one a single metal pot and specific instructions.

Each was to take the pot to a certain special place, dig a hole and bury it, leaving an attached cord out. When he had concealed the burial place, so that even he would have trouble finding it again, he was to pull out the cord and bring it piously back to Stannard.

Each of the Pasiki had the same orders but each had a separate place to go to. They departed, running. They might hate Stannard utterly, and surely their tasks were meaningless, but they would obey.

Stannard waited. One day. Two days. Three and four and five. The trading-ship should be grounded for not less than ten days. Stannard waited out five of them. Then he smiled grimly at Jan. His task from before his shipwreck fitted in nicely with his immediate plans.

He summoned all the Pasiki within miles. He had them remove the roof inside and out in one piece—it was coated inside and out with foamflex—and turn it upside down. Jan, like the Pasiki, did not understand at all. They obeyed because Stannard commanded it. Jan watched absorbedly, blindly confident in Stannard's wisdom.

Hundreds of the black shiny articulated creatures struggled to carry the upturned roof down to the water. At Stannard's further command they brought the flagstaff and fitted it upright in holes which surprisingly seemed to have been made for it.

They brought the awning, and ropes which Stannard had ordered them to make and provisions and water. He shipped a rudder and they gazed in absolute uncomprehension at a moderately seaworthy sailboat which was an artifact lost from their traditions. They did not even begin to grasp the idea until the boat was launched and Jan and Stannard were in it. Then they stared by the hundreds.

"I give commands," said Stannard sternly, regarding the horde of glistening black creatures on the shore. "We go to meet other man masters we shall summon from the sky. I have made machines, fifty of them, which send messages to other worlds.

"I made so many lest any one of them fail to reach its destined world with its message. I sent them away to be buried and to begin their message-sending. Even now the fifty machines send word through the skies to tell other man masters to come and be served by the Pasiki, who wish no greater gladness than to serve man masters.

"I command that the machines be left untouched by all the Pasiki until the other man masters come. And now this woman master and myself go to meet the other man masters when they come down from the sky?"

HE HOISTED the sail. It had been an awning, but it filled. The boat pulled out from the shore. It heeled a little in the breeze but it made surprisingly little leeway. It was, in fact, a reasonably able small boat. The land fell rapidly behind. Jan looked at Stannard in marveling admiration.

"The Pasiki have telepathy," he told her drily, "but can they tell where we are when they do not know themselves? Or what we do?"

"N-no," said Jan. "But did you really send messages for other space-ships to come to Pasik? That is wonderful!"

"It's a lie," Stannard told her. "A space radio is a pretty delicate and complicated device. I couldn't make them out of stray parts manufactured by the Pasiki! But the Pasiki think I did! And how long before they send word by telepathy and our friends back there think all space is filling up with a howl for the cops?"

"Not long," said Jan. "It will be very quick! But why—"

"How will they take that?" asked Stannard drily. "Brent, for one, is wanted for piracy, murder and other assorted crimes. The others who came to Pasik by choice did it for similar reasons. They do not want the Space Patrol here. And there's nowhere else where they can be safe.

"The Pasiki don't want other men here either but they daren't touch those buried pots. How long before the men get busy finding those pots and digging them up to blast them before a message can be picked up from them? If they open one and find it a hoax that won't prove the others are! They have to find every one and smash it for safety's sake!"

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Jan blinked at him. "But still," she said plaintively, "I don't see why—"

He told her and she gasped in amazement. Then, with a curious grimness all her own, she checked over the blasters at her waist. Stannard grinned at her. She flushed.

"You can't tell," she said firmly. "Just because I didn't kill Mr. Brent when I had the chance don't mean I won't kill anybody who tries to kill you!"

"I was grinning," said Stannard," because you once said you didn't know how to act like a woman."

But she did. She sat close beside him and shivered as the boat sailed toward the sunset.

* * * * *

The sky was barely paling to the east when the boat ran full-tilt aground. It had crossed the bay during the dark hours, and now Stannard was a little worried because he might be many miles out in his calculations. The map Jan had drawn him couldn't be expected to be too accurate.

But they forced their way through jungle and found a Pasiki trail and, within a mile, they came upon a little knot of three stickmen trotting along the path on their own private business. Stannard hailed them savagely and they knelt to him. Their regular master demanded extreme respect.

They led the way to the spaceport. Stannard walked boldly across the freshly jet-seared open space. The airlock door of the trader was open. He walked in with Jan crowding closely behind him. He closed the lock by manual control for silence.

"They've no discipline," he whispered in Jan's ear. "Trader!" There was scorn in the word. "Stay here. Blast anybody you see who isn't me. I'm going to see how many of the crew are on board."

But it was an anticlimax. Jan stood fiercely on guard until she heard his voice, very stern and very savage. Then there were scuffling footsteps and scared protestations. Two men only appeared, clad in the shapeless underwear of a space trader's forecastle.

"Sh-shall I shoot?" quavered Jan in a weak voice.

"No," said Stannard, behind them. "Only two men on board and they were fast asleep. All the others are out with parties of Pasiki, digging up the iron pots by telepathic instructions—which takes time—and blasting 'em to get them all destroyed as soon as possible. Stand aside, Jan."

He opened the airlock and drove the pair out.

HE SAW them running frantically for the edge of the field as the airlock closed again. He took Jan to the engine room and set the drive for control room handling. Gazing with all her eyes—she barely remembered the space-ship which had brought her to Pasik—she followed him to the pilot's cabin.

He strapped her in the co-pilot's seat and started the gyros, flashed the jets all around, then slowly and gently lifted the ancient trading ship off the ground. In fifteen minutes it was beyond atmosphere. In half an hour it was straightened out on a course for Sooris, which had been Stannard's destination in the *Snark*. In an hour he locked the automatic controls and turned to Jan.

She looked queer. Somehow upset and disappointed.

"What's the matter? Hate to leave Pasik?"

"Oh, no," she said uncomfortably. "Only—it seems as if something's missing. We got all ready for a fight. I thought you'd have to kill people and I was ready to kill anybody who tried to harm you and—and nothing happened."

"Except that we got away," said Stannard.

He watched her for a moment. Then he said amusedly, "Anticlimax, eh? But I'd have done a rather poor job of it if I'd let it end in smoking blasters and corpses all over the place. The Space Patrol doesn't work that way when it can be helped."

"Space Patrol?" said Jan, blankly.

"Me," said Stannard. "I'd been given an assignment that had me licked. There were rumors of a perfect asylum for criminals who could pay enough. I was set on the trail of it. I knew it was past Billem, and I thought it might be near Sooris. And I landed on Pasik by pure sabotage.

"But if I'd killed all the criminals who were supposed to be there and if I'd let the crew of this trader get away, why—I'd have fallen down on my job! And the Space Patrol doesn't like a man to try to guard too many prisoners. It's risky. So I—well—I locked them up on Pasik. Good rations and good care until a Patrol prison ship can come for them."

Jan's face cleared.

"Then that's all right," she said relievedly.

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"You did exactly what you were supposed to do! I wanted to be able to boast, you know. Now I can!"

"Mmmmm," said Stannard, reflectively. "We've got to do something about the Pasiki. They're all messed up for progress. Can't leave them to stew in their own fears and humans will have to keep off for a century or so.

"Maybe we can get some of those Miranians to take over and try to straighten them out. They aren't human but they're smart as whips. The Pasiki had a rotten deal."

He thought absorbedly. Jan stared at him. Presently she said diffidently, "Isn't the ship on automatic control now?"

"Eh? Surely!" said Stannard. "Why?"

"Darling," said Jan exasperatedly, "we're *engaged!*"

They were.

The Reader Speaks

(Continued from page 8)

the A-bomb, the V-2 and other rockets, supersonic flight and radar—and the need for and imminence of space flight, public interest is focused on science as never before in history.

A look at virtually any daily gazette will prove it. Where, ten years ago, almost any sort of crime story was good for a front page banner headline and only the rarest and most exciting of science stories could escape too-intimate association with the obituary column or the real estate news, today the reverse is usual.

Let a scientist of repute say almost anything about anything and he rates not only front page space but columnar and editorial comment. New discoveries have shoved all but the juiciest murders back to the interior columns. People in general are aware of science and what it can mean to their lives as they never did in the past.

Consequently, science fiction is on the march. But today, as never before, it needs a Sherlock Holmes and his Watson. We do not mean a pseudo-scientific detective, of course. We do mean that a character of eye-catching traits equivalent to those of the master of Baker Street is needed to lift stf out of the specialized into the generally popular reading fields.

Naturally, we'd like to come up with him ourselves. And the search for such a personality, attuned to the current hopes and fears of the world, is both constant and fascinating.

Actually it is you readers who will first discover him. But you cannot do that until we editors put him before you on the printed page.

And, though we know not whence he may come, he is almost certainly coming—because when such a character is truly needed he is sure to show up. It's the law of demand and supply.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

THE featured story in our April issue will be THE ULTIMATE PLANET, a long novelet by Noel Loomis of MR. ZYTZTZ GOES TO MARS and CITY OF GLASS fame.

It is a story of the clash of realities, human and alien, on an outpost of Stygia, coldest, darkest and most remote planet of the Solar System.

Dr. William Cusp, representative of the Science Party, a rigid and unscrupulous conservative in his desire to keep scientific learning for the chosen few, is thrown into almost immediate headlong conflict with John McAvity, representative of the Peoples Party and a believer in widespread dissemination of all knowledge. Both men are apparently civilized but long contact within the uncomfortable physical limitations of the outpost makes battle between them inevitable.

For both men are working upon the problem of instantaneous matter transmission—Cusp for his own profit, McAvity for the benefit of mankind. As time goes by neither man can trust the other and their term on Stygia becomes a wearing vigil, which is only broken by the arrival of the Grunk.

How this birdlike creature can exist in the icy lithium atmosphere of the planet and where he came from—for he is not a native of Stygia—are problems that briefly cause Cusp and McAvity to forget their feud.

But not for long. The Grunk itself represents a crucial element in their struggle

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against one another and the baffling problems of matter transmission, an element which ultimately brings their duel to a shattering and surprising climax. Mr. Loomis has written his most powerful story of a yet-to-be-discovered world. THE ULTIMATE PLANET is the stuff of which classics are made.

Edmond Hamilton will be back in April too—with ALIEN EARTH, an enthralling novelet of Farris, an explorer in the jungles of Annam who discovers apparent living statues among the trees. At first he believes them to be native corpses—until their rigidity dispels this eerie notion for one even more macabre.

The natives are alive—alive but in a state beyond catalepsy which is bewildering. And his bewilderment increases when he finds a young Frenchman, Berreau, under the spell to the grief of his sister, Lys. And then he discovers *hunati* for himself.

Hunati is something that makes opium look like lemon soda where trances are concerned.

And it is more than just a drug—for it puts human metabolism in line with the vastly slower life rates of vegetation. In short, it makes man with the forest. And, one like the forest, it is greatly to be feared.

One of the most stirring and unusual stories ever to come out of the Old Master's typewriter!

Ray Bradbury is to be among those present, too—with one of his most biting, amusing and vitriolic satires, entitled THE CONCRETE MIXER. Once again he deals with Martians, but this time Martians on Earth. And Martians far more deserving of pity than censure.

It is the ill luck of the first Earth-expedition of the red planet to land close to Hollywood—and what happens to the invaders in the glad-hand commercialism of the motion picture capital shouldn't happen to Martian dogs. This story, to us, rates with Mr. Bradbury's numerous prize-winning past efforts—perhaps is even a step or two ahead of them all.

Benj. Miller and the fourth of the Orig Prem series, ON THE HOUSE, will be back to tell of what really happened to Antony and Cleopatra and F. Orlin Tremaine will continue to analyze mankind and the future in a feature article. And, of course, there will be more short stories and features, including this department and its mates, THE FRYING PAN and the SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW.

Let's hope you like it!

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

SCIENCE fiction fans generally and the readers of TWS in particular are about as sharp a bunch of reading correspondents as any magazine has ever known. They have a genius for ferretting out editorial secrets almost before we are aware of said secrets ourselves.

Thus when, for almost the first time, a few of them pull a skull of sorts, we must be pardoned for noting same with a certain degree of levity. In our October issue, due to make-up requirements and a desire to give you the mostest of the bestest, we had occasion to use two Ray Bradbury short stories.

According to traditional editorial custom, we used a pseudonym on one of them. Because the stories themselves seemed of almost equal merit, we simply gave the first of them, THE SQUARE PEGS, the Bradbury byline and credited REFERENT, the authorship of Brett Sterling, which has long been a house name. This drew the following postcard from the real author:

Dear Editors: Without a doubt, the story REFERENT, by Brett Sterling, in the October issue of TWS, is the best damn story in the whole book. This is Sterling's best to date. More!—*Ray Bradbury.*

We thought that was rather fun. But apparently a lot of people didn't. In the six letters which follow the Bradbury story is lauded to the skies and the Sterling effort given a pasting.

The name Brett Sterling was created during the war when Edmond Hamilton, caught in the draft, was unable to continue to turn out his CAPTAIN FUTURE stories. Some of the best known names in science fiction took over the chore under the Sterling byline.

So, when you see Brett Sterling again, don't jump to bring your blast guns to bear upon the name. As a great German composer, Richard (not Hans) Wagner, once said, "Never sneer at the music of princes. You can't tell who may have written it!"

As the next six letters reveal, the same holds for Bradbury-Sterling.

HE BIT
by Jay D. Mann

Dear Editor: I'm glad to see that your new large size has not altered the quality of your stories. The October issue was one of the best you've had.

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The only novelet that didn't measure up to your usual standards was "Miracle Town". The idea itself was good but the development was awful. What Ray Bradbury could have made of that story!

And speaking of the Boy Wonder, "The Square Pegs" was (were?) superb. What a man! To think he can tell you the conclusion in advance and still hold your attention! I don't think that I have ever come across a similar plot in all my long years (three of 'em) of stfanship.

"That Mess Last Year" had an ending similar to H. G. Wells' "War of Worlds," in which the forces of nature defeated the invader(s) after mankind had failed. It was just as crudely done, too.

"I Like You, Too—" was nice, but I didn't understand the ending too well. Is that me or the story?

"Cosmic Jackpot" was good in both plot and handling. I didn't notice who the author was at first, but the instant I read about the "matter transmitter" I knew. Who else could it be but George O. (for Oliver, Oscar, Olly, etc.?) Smith?

"Reverse English" and "Softie" were both good fillers.

"No Winter, No Summer" was handled very nicely considering the mediocre plot.

Unfortunately, "Referent" was unintelligible because of its semantics to all who were not familiar with Korzybski's ā and C. K. Ogden's "Referent, reference, label" triangle. Could be Sterling was influenced by Van Vogt's "World of null-A," hmm?—*60 Exeter Street, Brooklyn 29, New York.*

A sterling letter, Jay, truly a sterling letter. As for the ending on I LIKE YOU TOO—it caused considerable perturbation here in the office and Joe Gibson had to rewrite it twice. The funny thing is we thought it was perfectly clear but haven't been able to explain it to anyone who thought otherwise.

STICKY RICKEY
by Rickey Slavin

Dear Editor: Just a short note to congratulate you on the absolutely meteroric rise in the quality and quantity of TWS & SS. The twins are tops in my book.

Look at what you have—Leigh Brackett, Temple, Frank Belknap Long, Bradbury, George O. Smith, Noel Loomis, Leinster, L. Ron Hubbard, St. Clair and now the great A. E. himself. Finlay, Stevens, good Lord—all we need now is slick paper. Then we'd really be in paradise.

Seriously now, as a fan, I doubt that there is much more we could want from TWS & SS in the way of improvements.

About the October ish of TWS—I think the best story in the issue was THE SQUARE PEGS by Bradbury. I have adored his work for years and what he is doing now only adds to it. G. O. Smith with his (humerous?) footnotes deserves a hug.

Orig Prem stinks.

Leigh Brackett—why doesn't she marry Bradbury? What a team they could make!

Burks stinks (I repeat myself).

Temple is here again I see. Rather cute.

MacDonald, fair—F. B. Long, good—Gibson, huh? Benj. Miller is a no-good writer—Carroll, cute—Laverty, very neat. This is the first time I've seen his name—Sterling, no sense, poor.—*1626 Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn 30, New York.*

You should know better, Rickey. But thanks for the flag waving before you dived into the specific.

HE'S GONNA GIVE UP
by Sheldon Kagan

Dear Ed: Wal, I guess it's time I heaved a hunka linen atcha. Just finished the Oct. ish. Wot you orta do is fill a whole mag with Bradbury. I say this right after telling myself I didn't like Ray's latest story, but that comes later. I been reading all the letters in ye reader's blah and nearly everyone praises Brad. And rightly so. If you don't keep your eye glued to the page you don't appreciate nuttin. Excuse fer the language boss, but I'm messing my English before I have to go back to, ugh—school. Lemme go thru this thing with a fine tooth comb.

Cover—Did Bergey do that? Seems to me that bald guy used that jewel hanging from his dome to cover up a hole in his head. The rest of it ain't so bad.

The Moon That Vanished—I thought this was okay till I read the rest of 'em.

That Mess Last Year—Great. But I didn't understand what significance the last word in the story had, unless it was just for the laffs.

Galactic Heritage—Good. Nice ending.

I Like You Too—Wonderful.

Yesterday's Doors—Strangely fascinating.

Miracle Town—Hee hee ha ha ho ho.

The Square Pegs—Not one of Bradbury's best but good nevertheless.

Cosmic Jackpot—Who's where and what's on first? There was so much switching back and forth I didn't bother to unravel the gummed tape.

Date Line—Fair and not so hot. Sounds like a weather broadcast, don't it?

Hsilnge Esrever—Same as above.

Softie—Typical of Noel Loomis. Brings fond memories of Mr. Zytztz Goes to Mars.

No Winter No Summer—this was one good story.

Referent—if you put more of this stuff in I'm gonna give up.

Well I gotta go now and rush down to the store P.D.Q. fer the next ish, hopin' it's a good one.—*1346 Grant Ave., Bronx 56, N. Y.*

Okay, so you give up. Tsk, tsk! That last line on THAT MESS LAST YEAR was, we thought, savagely effective. Tapping the power of the atom is the same as tapping that of the sun.

RATES A GRIPE
by Benjamin Birnbaum

Dear Ed: Although I have written some few times to your companion mag, SS, this is the first time that I have written to TWS, so gimme a little leeway, willya?

First, logically, we look at the cover—and then wish we hadn't.

Now we come to a fanhack's paradise. The stories! And so many of them! This is indeed a paradox. When the mag was thinner, usually there were at least two turkeys in the format, but in this issue, which I believe is the largest to date, there is only one story that I think rates a gripe.

That one is REFERENT, which simply provides me with another to add to the already lengthy list of reasons why you should get rid of Brett Sterling. There were two others that were just fair. They were MacDonald's THAT MESS LAST YEAR, which was pretty messy in its own right, and Carroll's REVERSE ENGLISH.

Bradbury, as usually, came through with flying colors with his THE SQUARE PEGS, which I think (Am I correct?) embodies a new angle in science-fiction. Three hips and a couple of huzzahs for Ray!

Long's GALACTIC HERITAGE was reasonably good, although it savored faintly of hack. Gibson's I LIKE YOU, TOO wasn't bad at all. THE COSMIC JACKPOT was cute. One thing bothered me, though. How could those two from Earth get through the machine to Mars?

Miller's DATE LINE was nice. More of Orig Prem. Loomis' SOFTIE wasn't science-fiction. It was a human nature short no matter what setting it was put in. However, it did fit in nicely. Laverty's NO WINTER, NO SUMMER followed an old theme, but it was well written and that makes up for a lot.

Oops! Nearly forgot the novelets, although they, out of all the stories in the mag, are the ones I'll remember longest. I won't say anything about THE MOON THAT VANISHED because, as Miss Zimmer says (even if she *did* mean a different story) anything said about that story will cheapen it, even if it is the highest praise. I am sincerely glad to see Miss Brackett back. She gives the mag a great lift.

However, TMTV is not the only superb story in this issue (Unusual, eh what?). The two other novelets were in the same category, although in two different fields; one serious, the other humorous. YESTER-

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DAY'S DOORS was as good, if not better, than TMTV and it is just begging for a sequel. Set Burke to work on one, will you, Ed? MIRACLE TOWN was wonderful (plug). It was an uproarious plot handled so as to make it more uproarious.

Smith's JACKPOT problem bothered us a bit too—but we didn't feel up to asking him. He has answers to everything. Next time you write us, give us your address, Benj. And do be kind to Sterling.

NOT UP TO CAP FUTURE
by Don Cox

Dear Ed: Just finished the latest ish of TWS, so here come the comments.

The Moon That Vanished— Not just what I expected, but it passed alright.

Yesterday's Doors— Now this is more like it. Time travel is right down my alley. (No, I don't live in an alley).

Miracle Town— A good story but the photons had me down a coupla times.

That Mess Last Year— What a mess, although it did seem to straighten out in the end.

Galactic Heritage— Good, good, good. Long is as good as ever.

I Like You, Too— Tense and exciting. Who is Joe Gibson?

The Square Pegs— She must have been a blockhead. Nice story, but I don't think she was the only nut around there.

The Cosmic Jackpot— A darn good story with a very orderly mixup. (Why should I waste all this good space? I shouldn't but I did).

Date Line— Another time story. As enjoyable as the other.

Reverse English— Boy! What a guy could do with a machine like that. Anybody got one for sale? A fair story.

Softie— Who's a softie? This held my interest all the way through. Gugenheimer, gugenheimer, gugenheimer. (No, I'm not crazy. It's a space filler and that's all)!

No Winter, No Summer— A fitting title and I would have got blown up too. (Don't you wish I had).

Referent— So-so. Brett Sterling used to write Captain Future didn't he? This comes nowhere near the C.F. stories.

The rest of the mag rates okay with me.

If you will recall a letter (?) written by a person going under the name of (name?) EMF, you will probably shudder. I have solved the code. It was nothing more than the International Morse Code.—*4 Sprine Street, Lubec, Maine.*

Not up to Captain Future, eh? Hmmmmm! As for Joe Gibson, he's a vet and an ex-fan and a promising new writer of stf. He should be hitting with more stuff any time now.

MERCIFULLY SHORT?
by Michael Wigodsky

Dear Sir: I might as well get the stories over with as follows, with brief comments:

1: THE SQUARE PEGS: Bradbury's flair for plot weaving is in full bloom in this fragment, so thoroughly bittersweet in its picture of a paradise of doom. I wonder if Bradbury intended to imply, at the end, that the real square pegs were John, Helen and Alice?

2: MIRACLE TOWN: I *love* this kind of story, or would insanity be a better word for it? And the ending surprised *me* at least. But then, I surprise easy. Still, it was a fine story, even without the ending. If possible, I'd like a sequel, with Arthur as the main character. He is a lot better than Bud Gregory, although how he acquired his records and his first editions is more than I can see, if he had never been out of Peterville.

3: COSMIC JACKPOT: GOSmith, the Old Hackful, has exerted his talents for comedy science fiction writing, to produce an establishment-of-communications-between-Earth and-Mars tale which rivals Boucher's EXPEDITION, which you published back in '43. In that story, it took me two pages to realize that the expedition was made up of Martians. Maybe the reason I liked it was the footnotes.

4: THE MOON THAT VANISHED: This is pretty far down on my list, but still good.

5: I LIKE YOU, TOO: I'm fairly reluctant to put this in fifth place, because of some vaguness in the ending, but the other's are worse.

7: YESTERDAY'S DOORS, GALACTIC HERITAGE, REVERSE ENGLISH, SOFTIE, NO WINTER NO SUMMER: All of these stories are at just about the bottom of mediocrity, and no comment is needed.

Ooops, I missed no. 6.

6: DATE LINE: This is just above those above. In fact, it's below some of them, but I'm a sucker for time-travel.

8: THAT MESS LAST YEAR, REFERENT: These stories, mercifully short, are utter nonsense. Thass all, folks.

Now to what's important, but we will condescend to glance at some others on the way to the great TRS.

In THE FRYING PAN is mentioned Hugh McInnis's "Books you don't often see" thing. I told him that I saw that, and the other Wellsianism he reviewed, a later issue, too often, as every bookstore I see is stuffed with them, but he said that everyone else told him that they had to "dig them out", so you and I must be wrong.

In the book review, I'm sure I'd agree with you if I had read the books. Where did you find a copy of THE FOX WOMAN? That thing has been out of print for six years.

I'm glad to see that vanV is coming up, but I thought that he had finished up the weapon-shop line long ago.

For the anthology, going backwards in the order published, I'd recommend AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT, THE BRINK OF INFINITY, THE IRRITATED PEOPLE, JERRY IS A MAN, THE CIRCLE OF ZERO, NOON, THE BIG NIGHT, COLUMBUS WAS A DOPE, PHALID'S FATE, THE GHOSTS OF MELVIN PYE, ABSALOM, THE LITTLE THINGS, THE DIMENSION OF CHANCE, THE SUPERMAN OF DR. JUKES, THE WORLD THINKER, THE VEIL OF ASTELLAR, DEATH FROM THE STARS, THE WORLDS OF IF, THE CITY OF SINGING FLAME, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, THE LOOT OF TIME. This is leaving out, of course, all stories which have already been anthologized.—*7744 Ridgeland Avenue, Chicago 49, Illinois.*

Not a bad list for your anthology, Michael. We're running Clifford Simak's THE LOOT OF TIME as our HoF selection in the March STARTLING. And we'd pick Leinster's DE PROFUNDIS, Carver's YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE and Shelton's DEVILS FROM DARKONIA against some of your weaker selections. But each to his own.

As for THE FOX WOMAN, Paul O'Connor, its co-publisher, brought us a copy for review. Its publication date was 1946. So you're off the beam on that one. Naturally we hate to disillusion a lad of your tender years but truth must prevail—it says here.

And that winds up the Sterling-haters for the nonce.

FANHACK REQUIREMENTS
by W. P. Meyer

Dear Editor: SUBJECT: Observations on fan letters. TO: The Neophyte.

1. Must profess enough knowledge to attempt a phonetic written letter, often resembling double-talk; and/or must be able to arrange words in poetry form regardless of accepted rules and conventions.

2. Must possess ownership of, or availability to, various dictionaries of specialized subjects in order to write expertly in scientific mumbo-jumbo.

3. Must know or pretend to know and use smatterings of Latin, French, and German, with or without translation.

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4. Must know and use current abbreviations and slang, as well as remembering discarded ones.
5. Must be able to write knowingly of the writers of literature in order to justify the time spent reading science-fiction.
6. Must refer to letters of other fans in previous issues and write as though you had known them all your life.
7. Must be aware of different trends and classifications in science-fiction stories and be able to comment superficially and with superiority on them.
8. Must always refer to some ancient half-forgotten story for comparison or comment.
9. Must arrange stories in order of your opinion and then tell the author what to write and how.
10. Must have unshakeable faith and undying loyalty toward one writer regardless of when or what that person wrote.
11. Must state among other personal information: length of time, usually in years, spent reading science-fiction; age; number of years in school, usually college, with subjects studied; etc.
12. Must be able to distinguish between good and poor illustrations and have formed certain definite ideas how it should look and where it should appear.
13. Must have some illogical idea to offer to one or all writers, fans and publishers of the science-fiction world.
14. Must, if feminine, adopt a name sounding full of mystery and suspense to go with the "New Look."
15. Must advertise to start, find or join a science-fiction club.
16. Must contain the irreplaceable words in some form or other: "This is the first time I have ever written. . . ."—*28 Custer Court, Penn Village, Pottstown, Pennsylvania.*

17. Must run like you know what for the nearest bomb shelter after mailing the editor such a missive as this. Okay, W. P., we enjoyed it thoroughly. *Un succes fou,* or *pax vobiscum* or just plain twenty-two point ninety-eight skiddoo.

ON THE SUBJECT OF WARPS
by William F. (Woof) Temple

Dear Editor: This morning's mail included the Oct. TWS, for which many thanks, and a letter from Arthur C. Clarke (of *Against the Fall of Night*) to say he's got First Class Honours in his Bachelor of Science degree. Can't understand why he didn't get better than First.

Surprised to find one or two people even liked *Way of Escape.* I'm inclined to agree with the fellow who said it was corniest of all, although he spoiled his standing as critic by saying Bradbury's ". . . *And the Moon Be Still as Bright*" was corny too. There's no possible doubt whatever (how did Gilbert & Sullivan get in this?) that B.'s yarn is of the genius literature. An examination of B.'s stories, in *Dark Carnival,* e.g., will show our Ray is a little warped somewhere. Seems to have a pathological hatred of babies and no great love for women. Possibly he was an oversensitive kid who had a baby brother or sister on whom his mother lavished all the love *he* wanted. Hence hatred of both of 'em. Possibly. Wish I were a little more warped. Seems to be a sign of genius. Clarke's a warp.

Your editorial on history was brilliant. So you're probably bent too. Actually, no lead to peace for mankind will ever come from historians, politicians, economists, strategists, soldiers, statesmen or people in authority of any kind. Not even editors. Because they think of people in terms of masses, classes, military divisions, figures on a chart, arrows on a map, or "the public." They can't think of John Doe as a human being. Only he can do that. Only he can take the mental and moral step upwards, which they can't, to a real sanity and dignity of behaviour which will spread and become public opinion and class most of the babblings of the aforementioned authorities as certifiable paranoia. And push most of them out of business. "The next revolution will be a one-man revolution," as someone said—perhaps Whitman. See also Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means.*—*7 Elm Road, Wembley, Middlesex, England.*

So we're warped—so what? At any rate we try to think as little as possible about "the public." And have no particular desire to lead humanity anywhere, good, bad or indifferent. Possibly a chronic distrust of the entire "leader" philosophy caused by recent history. Why must people be led?

Our father had an aunt-by-marriage with whom he was raised and who decided people could only find salvation through abolition of alcohol. Yes, her name was Frances Willard and look at all the trouble she started. Our wife's great-grandfather, old Zebulon Vance who suggested the period between drinks be shortened while conferring with the governor of South Carolina, did a lot less harm.

We're for leaving them alone as much as possible.

HARVEST REAPED
by Gwen Cunningham

Dear Editor: I'd like, first of all, to thank you for publishing a letter of mine and the many fans who answered it so kindly. I have now *several* copies in fair to excellent condition of the magazine I wanted, containing Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar." I am grateful for so many kind friends, all of whom I tried to thank at once. If I missed anybody, please let me thank him now. It was wonderful to realize how many helpful and generous people there are after all. And to the others who sent cards with hints on how to get magazines I want in the future, I extend thanks also. I am proud to belong to such a swell bunch of folks—the fans of stf and fantasy!

Now for the October issue. Burks' "Yesterday's Doors"—this was okay except that the solution was too weak to explain the rest of it. Temple—"Miracle Town"—a good laugh, lots of fun to read. MacDonald—"That Mess Last Year"—cute. I liked it. Long—"Galactic Heritage"—not bad. I've seen better but this wasn't bad. Gibson—"I Like You Too"—good technique but silly plot. Bradbury—"Square Pegs"—Good old Ray. He's done better and a lot of the story was dopey but, just the same, it's a good bit of characterization. I liked it. Smith—"Cosmic Jackpot"—Best story in the issue. Short but sweet. Cute idea—especially the footnotes. Miller—"Date Line"—I never did like ideas that portray historical figures as speaking slang and selling hot dogs. Sorry he wrote this as evidently he *can* write. Carroll—"Reverse English"—not exactly bad. The idea was good but the author missed its best points. Loomis—"Softie"—A close runner-up to Smith's story. Fine characterization, well told throughout. Good work. Laverty—"No Winter, No Summer"—Good story. Keep punching, Don. Sterling—"Referent"—clever, very good reading.

About Dale Wise's letter—I may accurately state that to any of the intelligentsia (Sure, that's me—you wanna make sumpin of it?) it is evident that the egg came first. I cite as my authority the fact that all life was once born from a single cell in the primordial ooze of the World, when it was in itself a new-born cell. And from all I've read about the human and animal embryo it is definitely proven that, before it becomes a form, it is merely a cell, which becomes an egg, which then becomes an embryo that is eventually born.

See you next time.—*8519 MacArthur Boulevard, Oakland 5, California.*

Your father thanks them, your mother thanks them and so on. Seriously, we're glad the response was so heartening, to say nothing of effective. Stfers are basically a generous lot when they aren't feuding. As for the cell and egg business, whatever did be-

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come of the house that Jack built? Or what *was* the matter with the custard?

MARBLE HALLS OF STF!
by Norm Storer

Dear Ed: No comments this time—just a verse that you couldn't beat in a million years for all your verse-forms and ABA, CBS, etc. Have at you!

HYMN TO THE THRILLING TWINS
(To be sung to the tune of The Marine's Hymn)

I

From the tales of Thrilling Wonder
To the novels of Star-tl-ing,
We have read our fav'rite's stories
Till our heads begin to ring.

But we must buy these magazines
For we're fans right to the core,
And our bookshelves now are sagging
With these mags of STF galore.

II

We've read Kuttner, Smith, and Brad-bu-ry
And world-buster Ham-il-ton.
We've seen pics by Smith and Finley
And "Mad Mark's" stuff by the ton.

There is also Murray Leinster
And dear Mar-gar-et St. Clair
But to give us stuff like Napoli—
Tell me, sir, is that quite fair?

III

Tho you've made improvements by the score
There are still some things to do;
Like a cover by our Virgil
Or some better verse from you.

But how e'er you run your magazines
We'll forgive you for your sins
For we're proud to buy these gaudy pulps
That are known as the Thrilling Twins.

Thar! Beat it if you can. But don't be too sarcastic, ol' man—there's too much ego-boo in that for you to turn on me.

How will Ye Editor get out of this one? Tune in next week, kiddies. . . .—*1724 Miss. St., Lawrence, Kansas.*

Okay, we'll respond lyrically (we hope) to the tune of the March of the Men of Harlech, which all of you should know, even if you don't. A very stirring old Welch air of the Border Marches. To wit—

NORMAN, YOU'RE SO RIGHT!

Have you spots before your eyesies?
Are your little tonsils drysies?
Care not. Keep your THRILL TWINS bysies
Norman, see the light.

If you find your spirit ailing
And your contact lenses bailing
In your THRILL TWINS find clean sailing
Though you're not quite bright.

Girls in Bergey's bloomers
Thrill to Noel Loomis
If Jim Blish is not your dish
Try Ray Z. Gallun's OPERATION PUMICE

And if Verne Stevens you is peevin's
Be satisfied with Finlay's leavin's
In your THRILL TWINS there's no grievin's
Norman, you're so right.

And that, for the nonce, will have to do, brother Storer.

BULLOCK'S BACK
by Jerri Bullock

Hello Toots: I like your new department "The Frying Pan"—hope it's here to stay. *Si o no?* Love that "half-soon horror"! A thought—THE READER PEEKS is getting a lot of newcomers. Good, good. New (rather, fresh) blood and all that sort of rot! I noticed you dared say that the literature (ugh!) was of the screw-ball type as presented in the October TWS. All the femmes are picking out monickers you say? Russ Manning is always saying, "Great shades of Ghu!" when he writes me, so just call me Ghu. (Ghudie for you.—Ed).

Leigh Brackett was a sight for sore eyes. Let's have some more of the same pronto. Because Bradbury is my pet author I won't mention "The Square Pegs" more than to say it certainly wasn't his best. I liked "The Cosmic Jackpot" best of the shorts. I read it when I was in just the right mood. Although the novelets were two definite types of stories I rated them about even. Ghu-by.—*22200 Lemon Avenue, Hayward, California.*

We're keeping "THE FRYING PAN" in for the present.

OH, THOSE RABID TEEN-AGERS!
by K. Martin Carlson

Dear Editor: I have noticed that quite a few of the N.F.F.F. members are writing in regularly to TRS. You have a rabid bunch of teen-agers on your hands each issue of TWS, and I don't envy your job of maintaining the peace in your pages. Still it is a healthy sign that all goes well with your publication.

Rick Sneary was missing in Oct. issue. What happened to him? His letters are always good for a chuckle. You undoubtedly have noticed that he has some good ideas in *most* of his misspelled letters to you.

I have no gripes or complaints. This must be welcome to you. And now TWS does it too! A Fanzine Review! Splendid! Both STARTLING and THRILLING WONDER are on the TOP of my list of magazines for the main reason that they cater to the STF FAN and his Fanzines. As long as this policy is adhered to, you will always have a steady readers' group.

Do you know that most of the stf fans buy TWO copies of TWS? They save one for future trading. Just try to get a 1932 TWS for 25c. Dealers are asking as high as 50c for one issue.

Keep those letters coming in to the Editor, all you N.F.F.F. members. Let's show him we really appreciate his good-will towards Fans and Fandom.—*K. Martin Carlson, Sec.-Treas. of N.F.F.F.*

Well, we thank you, K. Martin Carlson, and the National Fantasy Fan Federation. We like to hear from the so-called fans, though basically our chief interest is keyed to meet that huge plurality of our readers who are not affiliated with any stfan organization.

By the way, we didn't think TWS was published in 1932—though its predecessor WONDER STORIES was. Better check up on that one, Martin. As to what happened to Sneary—*quien sabe?* He'll be welcome in these pages, however, when, as and if.

FROM NOT-SO-DARKEST AFRICA
by L. F. Nunn

Sirs: For some time now I have been reading and enjoying your magazine. The stories have been improving every issue. Unfortunately, owing to the shortage of dollars, I have been having a harder and harder job to get copies of TWS. My news agent has been able to get me some up to a month or two back

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but now the shelves are empty and I have lost touch with science fiction.

I wonder if any of your readers would answer an S.O.S. from Darkest Africa and send a little light in the form of copies of TWS and SS which they have finished. I would be only too glad to return the good turn if your readers could oblige me with these.

Hoping you will be able to find some good Samaritan who can help me.—*P. O. Box #537, Bulawaya, Southern Rhodesia.*

Okay, fellows and girls—the above was dated July 12, 1948. Remember, Southern Rhodesia is a long, long way off, even in this era of hyped-up transportation. We feel certain you'll do what you can as all of you know how dire is the plight of an stficianado without his stf. Thanks.

BRIEF NOTE
by Ila Workman

Dear Editor: Thank you for publishing my first letter in your August issue. I received my copy of THE DARK WORLD almost immediately and sat up till one o'clock reading it and enjoyed it very much. I have also enjoyed the correspondence that has resulted from my letter's appearance in your column.

Hamilton is still my favorite author. His VALLEY OF CREATION is the best since FORGOTTEN WORLD. By the way, Ed, thanks for your kind comment on my letter (Whose—ours? You must be daft!—Ed.). I surely appreciated it.

I like the new enlarged size. In fact, I like nearly everything about your two magazines. Everything, that is, except the covers, but then I guess a perfect magazine would be just too much to expect.—*38 East 200 South, St. George, Utah.*

Gee, whiz, Ila—why'd you have to go and spoil everything with that crack about our covers? And where in hades did we run your epistle in the August issue? We couldn't find it in our copy. Were you by any chance being sarcastic? If so, consider yourself properly chastized. If not, we'll consider ourselves ditto.

Cheers—we found it. We were looking vainly in the October issue. And we really *weren't* unkind and you *weren't* sarcastic. Write us again, please.

ANTI-FRYING PAN
by Stewart Metchette

Dear Editor: I have no especial comment to make on the latest TWS. But, I do have a suggestion which I hope you will consider seriously:

Drop THE FRYING PAN as a humor catch-all, and substitute a regular, legitimate fanzine review. With the monthly alternation between SS and TWS, the fanzines could be reviewed with far better regularity. The lapse of time between bi-monthly issues of SS is sufficient to have at least another issue of the mag reviewed, already in the hands of its subscribers. Then the review of that issue does not appear until the next or second-next issue of SS; by which time another issue or so is something of the past.

I seriously think that a legitimate fanzine review in TWS, to alternate with that in SS, is by far preferable to the droopy contents of the FRYING PAN in its present form. In fact, that is the only thing in the Oct. ish that doesn't click with me.

THE MOON THAT VANISHED would have sounded better if the original title MOONFIRE had been used rather than the long one which you grafted onto Miss Brackett's fantasy novel. Somehow I think Moon That Vanished was a fantasy. (I think it only to start a feud, maybe.)

YESTERDAY'S DOORS was reminiscent of the Merritt tales in which the hero was continually falling back into some or other previous life-span. Readable.

MIRACLE TOWN, COSMIC JACKPOT, DATE LINE and THAT MESS LAST YEAR were all humorous. Maybe as a result of your pertinent article on same in science fiction, *nien?* Anyway, I wish we could have Temple's electron-people on the loose in New York . . . or in the assembly room or editorial offices of a stf mag. What a story!

Bradbury's tale was read first, as befits the reputation he has built up; but I think Ray was standing on that rep in order to justify the appearance of SQUARE PEGS. It was a turkey, to say the least. Give us more like CREATURES THAT TIME FORGOT or IRRITATED PEOPLE.

What gives with all the new names? Gibson, Carroll, Laverty and Miller. Miller at least is scheduled for a return, but how about the others?—*3551 King Street, Windsor, Ontario.*

Do we detect a certain irony in your suggestion that Temple's electron-folk might prove useful around an stf office? Or do we? As for the new names, Miller is the only one of the quartet currently scheduled—not that we wouldn't welcome any or all of the others. It is our hunch that Charles I. Harness, whose FRUITS OF THE AGATHON appeared in the December TWS and whose first lead novel FLIGHT INTO YESTERDAY, will appear in a later issue of STARTLING STORIES, is scheduled to be the stfind of 1948-9.

I NEVER SAW A FANZINE
by George Nims

Greetings and Salutations: I have just finished reading the October issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories and was very pleased with all the stories. I did think, however, that The Cosmic Jackpot would have been better if it had been developed into a longer story.

I was interested in your discussion on "fanzines". I never saw any copies and I wonder if you could tell me how I might get copies of some.

The only complaint I have to find with this issue is the date! Why should an issue that is sold in July have an October date The only possible effect of this is confusion.

We're not all screwballs who read STF and those first few letters could just as well been eliminated.

Otherwise, keep the mag exactly as it is now and you'll keep us all happy.—*1216 Park Row Bldg., New York 7, N. Y.*

Speaking of new authors, that is.

SHORTIE
by Mrs. Georgia Eggleston

Dear Ed: I hope you can find space to print this note. I read every issue of TWS and SS I can get my hands on. They're wonderful.

I am married, am 23 years old, have two sons. I would like to hear from anyone who likes fantasy. I shall try to answer all letters. I have a few magazines and would trade. Thanks, Ed., for your help.—*1003 E. Mohave St., Phoenix, Arizona.*

We think you're wonderful too, Georgia from Arizona. Good luck on the fan life. Let us know how you come out.

You've never seen a fanzine? We have a hunch your age of innocence is over. As for the predating of our issues, you and our circulation department can fight that one out by yourselves. We wish no part of it. They

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could put an August date on this issue and we would have nothing whatever to say. As for the screwball letters in the October, 1948, issue—well, you should have known us when if you found them hard to take.

WHERE FAN DANCERS MEET
by Franklin M. Dietz Jr.

Dear Editor: Got my two copies of the new TWS today, and was more than pleased.

Your editorial on the history of our human race and the need for us to heed its warning was interesting and very, very well put. If more people could realize the truth in your words, maybe someone would do something. Y'know, ed, it seems to me that the reading of STF more or less makes one realize the truth of those things which you said about the history-pattern and trends in humanity. Why, I wouldn't really know, as I'm no psychologist, but I do know it's pretty hard to find a reader of STF who doesn't realize these things are true. All in all, ed, a very commendable editorial. I myself thank you for putting such thoughts in print.

The Reader Squeaks, that meeting place for all fans, was very good this issue, as usual every issue. Especially noticable in it was the letter from Capt. Kenneth F. Slater, with his request for us American fans to write him to arrange for a swap of American and English mags with some one or two of the English fans. I know by this time all us American fans are aware of the English fan's plight, so I guess Capt. Slater will become quite busy very soon, what with all the letters he should be getting. Really, I can't even imagine one fan who wouldn't write him, and arrange to help out some English fan. My offer of my services will be sent tomorrow, along with this missive.

Your mention of the Long Island RR switchbacks, as compared to George O. Smith's in his "Trans-Galactic Twins," was quite an applicable representation, I must say. As one who knows said RR Line, I think you scored a very good point. (Not that it makes any difference one way or another.)

The line-up of stories in this issue are swell, and all of 13 too. Boy, oh boy, plenty of good reading ahead, I can see. Of the cover, one comment—it looked weak. No, not the art, or the subject, but rather the yellow at the bottom. Instead of the "action" of the picture drawing the eye that yellow did it.

Well, that seems to be all on that. Now one thing else, before I close. (I'm putting this in with the hope you will at least print this part of my letter.) All fan-artists are invited to join the Fantasy Artisans Club, "where fan-artists meet".—*Box A—Employee, Kings Park, L. I., New York.*

We hope you do get some fan dancers for your club, Franklin. They have a way of livening up any gathering. Hope the stories in the October issue lived up to your anticipations.

OUR MAG IS YOUR MAG
by Josephine Bishop

Dear Ed: I have just finished reading TWS, October issue. I'm not one to write a lot of guff but I had to stop (right in the middle of Garvin Berry's letter) and say what I thought of his remarks in respect to the impression *he* got from that classic of classics, AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT.

The paragraph of his that began, "Most fans will doubtless mistake this . . ." spoke the truth but only in part. So then he tells himself to get down off the soap box. I would like to say, "Please don't." (well, say it, Jo—Ed.) "Stay up there, Garvin. This world of would-be world leaders has a lot to learn about tolerance and self respect (Self respect being measured by the respect the individual shows for the property and ideas of those whom he does *not* understand.)"

I should have started this letter with a remark or six about how well I like your (May I change that to *our*?) mag, but the right words haven't been invented yet. (Just how do you mean that, Jo?—Ed.).

Reading an Oona and Jick story is like eating milk toast for breakfast occasionally. Good for a change. Then I go back to my hot cakes and eggs with a better than ever appetite.

May I say just one thing in closing? (Why shore—Ed.) Being a female of the species and one who has had her share of the wolf whistles I still don't like that knowing leer that comes over the faces of the idle loungers and the characters in attendance every time I pick up this mag. They *do* leer in a most crude and moronic manner. Why, oh why, must I be subjected to this when I L-O-V-E you the way that I do?—*General Delivery, San Leandro, California.*

We'll bite, honey—why? Seriously, the time for you to start worrying is when they stop leering. We'd like a seat on that morons' bench ourselves.

UNFORGETTABLE
by Rodney Palmer

Dear Editor: You have published a story that will not be forgotten, nor will the Virgil Finlay illustrations be forgotten, as long as science-fiction lives. It is just another of the masterworks, in the long line of masterworks introduced to fandom by you, and former editors. All hail:

YESTERDAY'S DOORS, by Mr. Arthur J. Burks.—*226 West 60th Street, Chicago 21, Ill.*

A banzai to you, too, Rodney, for that one. We rather liked it ourselves.

LEEWAY
by Lee Budoff

Dear Editor: I think that I would like to feel the way that you must feel now. The pleasure attained from the knowledge that you have created something worthwhile and good and regarded with warmth and affection must be sweet indeed. I have followed TWS for quite a few years now. I've seen it when the explanation for the cover art went to the actual lengths of synopsis on the contents page. I've seen blurbs for stories that treated them as the ultimate in stef achievement in words that a child might have used upon being told his first fairy tale.

I've seen the pre-Sarge days when most of the handful of letters published were studied essays of admiration and timid attempts at criticism. You've passed the time when stef vaguely, youthfully, struggled for something, it knew not what. Struggles that took the half-conscious desires for the realities of space travel and strange adventure and the unknown and shaped them into the words of the Sarge and his followers. Words that were such pitiful understatements, such childish attempts at make-believe to substitute for the immense and choking feelings that futilely welled up inside us all.

Sometimes it seems that you have kept the same set of readers who go so far as to write to you, readers who have grown up with the magazine, and have passed with it through the stages of wondering, uncritical childhood to inane, flamboyant adolescence, and at the present stage, to the beginnings of adulthood—adulthood of the early twenties, still experimenting with new things, but with a certain new critical insight upon its own needs and desires. Not yet have you reached the stage of set middle age when all things will comfortably fit into pleasing but never-changing patterns, nor the futile and bitter aspect of senility grown smug in the knowledge that all things were, and therefore can never be again.

I smile to look at the letters in the current issues, letters displaying all the signs of children grown and trying to make amends for the unexpressed feelings of childhood. Some signs of adolescence still linger in the seemingly vastly different letters over-swollen with ponderously verbose expressions and heady attempts to reduce the universe to neat equations.

The children have labored through their lessons and are now reciting what they have learned. They are playing with words and symbols and unorthodox means of expression in order to be individuals, and express themselves that others might vaguely guess what they are feeling and thinking. They are surely

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a far cry from the gangly youths who ecstatically awarded jugs of zeno to favorite stories invariably and inevitably.

They are discovering—or rather re-discovering in the light of their coming of age—that their deep thoughts and feelings, are quite common among their fellows. Coming at this time, this discovery has enveloped us with a cloak of warmth and understanding that perhaps may be symbolized by the depth and emotional content of the stories of Ray Bradbury and other authors who have felt the urge of healthy change.

Perhaps, if Ray had not been a fan through all these changes, he would not have written as he has, but he has gone through the various stages along with the rest of us. He is the lucky spokesman who is able eloquently to give voice to his thoughts. That's why his stories have such a deep effect upon us, because they are like what we are within our innermost beings, and it feels good to have them brought out in words that might have come from the subconscious of any of us.

Perhaps you will smile at my halting efforts to express myself. I am not a Bradbury, but this is the way I feel, the way I interpret the changes in the magazine that has so gracefully attained its majority.

It could have been different with a different editor. One less sensitive and understanding might not so generously have catered to the whims of his readers to the amazing extent that you have. Perhaps he would not so understandingly have interpreted the signs of healthy growth and change that need a wise and not too restraining hand to care for them. He might not have made some of the blunders that you have, blunders that are, even in the otherwise faultless current edition, much in evidence.

But then, he wouldn't have learned from them either. He might have regarded his seat in the editorial office as just another job, to be dispatched with the minimum of effort. Of course, the resultant magazine might not be touched with the signs of evident and deep enjoyment that are so eloquent throughout the pages. Often I have caught myself chuckling over a verse or blurb or some other sign of the editorial hand, and thinking, "Gee, he really enjoyed THAT."

Do I sound silly? I hope not, because I don't regard myself as silly any more than I regard Chad and Tungsten, or basic English letters or theories of Time-Space so dear to the hearts of the more pedantic correspondents. Maybe I'm leaving myself open to the snide remarks of Jack Clements and his fraternity because of my sex, a thing that is utterly beyond my control. But right now I don't feel so much like a woman as a human being, nor so much a simpering, selfish female as a member of the so-called Homo Sapiens, who deeply desires to know myself and my friends, also members of this sometimes not-too-flattering category.

I feel good in the knowledge that I can send this letter to a magazine whose editor has the patience and understanding to read letters like mine. Who seriously reads and sympathizes with all correspondence. I hope I have been able to convey my feelings to you. I was utterly unable to comment upon the superb current issue of TWS.—*1130 E. Brill Street, Phoenix, Arizona.*

Well, Leatrice, it's nice to be so appreciated. Seriously, this growing up business has been pretty much a Topsy process. It just happened rather than followed any set plan of development. Perhaps the key lies in the increased scope of the stf field—in reader, not in content growth, of course, for the universe seems to cover a lot of space.

At any rate, we've come a long way since 1944.

And the best part of the whole deal is that we've got such a long way still to go. It should be an interesting progress if both of us follow it faithfully. For there is nothing more interesting or with a higher potential than people and their imaginations when they are not atrophied by fear. And fear of ideas —the deadliest of all stultifying horrors, is something no true stf fan or reader can ever really know.

NO MORE GROANS—NO MORE GRIPES

by Ernie Auerbach

Dear Editor: Your extra pages have now put you on top in the field. My gripes and groans are ended. No faults can I find with the Oct. issue.

Satisfaction has ruined my idealistic notions as to any improvements for TWS. I could only hint at possible developments in the feature section.

Next thing you know, *Popular Library* will be publishing stf between boards, as Ed Cox screamed for.

I enjoyed Brackett's lead tale. Wonderful! We don't have to compare it with past 'classics' by Leigh, do we? Sufficient to say—it was a grand pseudo-scientific yarn that went down very smoothly; well lubricated by Finlay's pic's, which incidentally take first place for the issue.

Maybe I'm at variance, but I prefer the spotlighted story in TWS and SS; the feature novelet or short novel to lean heavily towards fantasy—with the short novelets to smack heavily of science. And to the devil with the shorts, as long as:

1. They are well written, with adherence to continuity.
2. They remain highly thought-provoking.
3. And they become a future medium (now with added pages, allowing more room for shorts) for the fans with ideas who don't have sufficient writing experience. This means loosening up a bit on editorial requirements. If you can't take their stories, then encourage them with a *try again* on the margin of the rejection slip.

The novelets were fine. Burks and Temple did well.

And the shorts were a presumptuous lot. Both old-timers and the relative newer boys. Most of these tales easily make the *B* list. Two out-and-out stunk! I won't mention any names, however.

I want to take time right now to point out the last-but-not-least two yarns in the short story listing.

I can best say that they were both A tales. Yes, *No Winter, No Summer*, and *Referent* get the number one and two ratings for this issue, in that order.

The Kuttner-Sterling story was engrossing. Very finest writing in some time for Hank's shorts. This is what I like to see in the mag!

Well, swap-my-yamikah-for-a-turban if I don't have that crazy hunch that something ain't quite right with the Donald Laverty yarn!

It is my choice for first place in the issue, and I have come to the following conclusion.

1. That Donald Laverty is Henry Kuttner.
2. That Henry Kuttner had better watch out for this guy.

This is the finest story-of-its-type that has come out of your magazine in quite a few months. I'll expect many of your readers will agree. The thing is deep. It contains a high and quite valuable vein of satire that I admire.

He achieved quite a level of expostulating the human race, that some would say bordered on sophistry.

To the contrary—I think the guys that would claim such do not have quite as broad an insight into human nature, and where it might lead humans as a social group, as they would claim in criticizing Laverty.

The very things that Mankind strives for may of necessity destroy his esthetic spirit of evaluation in the end.

I re-read *The Time Machine* and find that H. G. Wells came to these same extensional seeming-conclusions in his story, although the science of his time and its then present (his temporal chronological section of Man's history) effect gave no hint of the technological advancement and its acceleration at the time Wells wrote the tale, as compared with the year in which he died.

Neither can the fans who read the inference from my syllogisms be made or anything but abashed when, at the end of their life-span, like Wells, they see changes in their own individual Utopias, changes that they never expected.

The all-important fact remains—that stf is accurately predicting the major changes and advances in the over-all culture pattern of Man.

Fans on the verge of idealism and objectivity can see this Utopia and after pursuance thereof of their art—namely wallowing in science-fiction and fantasy for a year or two—may even see the forest for the trees;

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namely and to wit, that some system is needed to bring it all about.

They fail as egotists often do, to analyze subjectively the form or pattern that these systems will take.

That is why these persons never contribute anything valuable to stf, much as they may love it.

They are so enthralled in their erotic absorption and assimilation that they never produce, never create.

But Laverty is going to insult the egos of quite a few, I imagine.

I like that Zimmer gal. She says Ray is human. That means she is human too. I like humans. I like that Zimmer gal.

By the by, I have run into that gentleman, connoisseur, philosopher and author-of-note, Tom Pace, down here in sunny Miami.

He does not think with every fluctuation of his rods and cones and his mind is not like a dried-up artist's palette. Quite a nice guy in fact. Some bull sessions. You might say that Tom Pace, Bill Entrekin and myself constitute fandom for the Miami area. If there are any objections, let said objector drop Bill a line at the University and argue about it. In fact we might even let him argue with us when we get together.

Thanks sincerely for the tips on the forthcoming yarns for next-year. Good line-up.—*Miami University, Branch 34, Florida.*

Laverty, we can say with the utmost candor, is not Henry Kuttner. And Hank can still take care of himself in the editorial infighting. See THE TIME AXIS in January's STARTLING STORIES if you don't believe same.

As for relaxing our fiction standards to admit more fanauthors, we'd like to achieve the desired broadening and freshening of ideas without lowering the bars. After all, the toughest part of writing is coming up with the ideas—and if the boys have 'em they should be able to write 'em.

Joe Gibson was a fan until recently—and look at Brackett, Bradbury and the like. We'd rather keep lifting the bars and making the magazine something increasingly more worth while to shoot at. Thanks for an interesting letter, Ernie. And good luck with your Florida fandom.

MERE WOMAN
by Grace Mosher

Dear Editor: May a mere woman reader of fifteen years' standing say something to that big lug Rodney "Rodway" Palmer? You know he really asked to be put in his place. I, as a silent fan of long standing, will agree with him that the old authors were good. So are those of today.

My dear Rod, where would you be if it weren't for a woman? Don't belittle us. I read these magazines when I had to hide them from my mother or see them burned and I liked them. I am a woman.

I'll admit that some of the dry scientific data went over my head but for years I have returned again and again to the same magazine. I've made a great many others read them by lending or giving mine and have helped fandom to grow. I know how I feel and, after fifteen years, I don't feel like changing my style of reading just to please a man.

I can't twist words like Chad Oliver or Joe Kennedy (By the way, where is Joe?) so I've kept silent. In my town, I seem to be the only fan but I'll continue to read stf and if I feel like it I'll write in and say my say too.

As for the October issue of TWS I liked the stories and felt that the authors who wrote them did a good job. I read for enjoyment and they gave me that. "Yesterday's Doors" by Arthur J. Burks was very good. "The Moon That Vanished"—Leigh Brackett! Leigh Brackett is always good but it goes in second spot. I read "Miracle Town" to my twelve-year-old daughter. I like humor in stf.

Of the short stories, "I Like You Too" was wonderful. As for "The Square Pegs" by Bradbury—is he ever bad? It would be grand if such a place could be. "Softie" by Noel Loomis rates an easy third. "No Winter, No Summer" by Donald Laverty made me realize how much the clear waters of a brook, the green of the grass and the sturdy tree could mean. I found it hard to picture a world without them, yet I was sorry to see it destroyed. The others were good and I enjoyed all of them and now I'll patiently wait until the next TWS comes out (Hey—what about STARTLING STORIES?—Ed.)

I started reading science fiction from books which were given to me. The first magazine in this category I ever bought was STARTLING STORIES (We sit corrected—Ed.) and I've never missed an issue. I used to send them to my brother in the Marines during the war. Today I have three or four years of magazines. Some day my son and my daughters will read them too—and until they do you have one staunch friend in our house and she is a woman.—*373 Chenango Street, Binghamton, New York.*

A nice letter, Mrs. Mosher, and we hope not the last from your pen. Joe Kennedy has, alas, eased up on his fanactivity since becoming a college student. As for Chad, when last heard from he was one of the endless string of fullbacks on the University of Texas squad. Let's hope you continue to find us worthy of your loyalty.

THANKS
by K. F. Slater, Esq.

Dear Ed: Judging by correspondence received my missive of 26/4/48—sorry, you reverse that, don't you?—of 4/26/48 musta hit print in the Oct ish of TWS. My thanks to you and to all the American Fen who rallied round. The conspiracy on the part of the Government anti-fan league to wreck the lives of hundreds has now been foiled. But even better, it shows that no matter what the 'orrible newspapers may say, there is a lot of fellow-feeling 'twixt your folks and our folks—even if only in a special class of fantasy readers. Jolly good show!

I got an awful idea, that altho my sub has now been renewed; I shall have missed the Oct ish—but someone is sending me one—the trouble is the time-machine production. I look at the listing I have made out, and say, 'Ah, plenty of time—it don't expire 'til October.' I forget that what I call August is what you call October!

But better news, yet! Various fans, feeling that generosity is all right, but not be misused, have been worming around and finding things out. Although not publicised, it IS possible for British fen to obtain a renewal—IF they can produce any evidence that they already have a sub, and that it requires renewal—this calls for co-operation on the part of your subscription dept., Mr. Editor.

They need to send a notice some three months before expiry, enabling the fan to get this in time to persuade the Post Office to give him an application form, send it up to the Board of Trade, get it approved, and then purchase an International Money Order. Will you pass the dope on, please? And also, if you would be so good, circulate the same info to your many rival concerns? Can do? Thanking yew SO much.—*Riverside, South Brink, Wisbech, Cambs., England.*

Glad your S.O.S. got results, Kenneth. As for the chief source of information about British fandom for these columns and those of TEV, we trust you'll keep the letters coming.

Our subscription department is going to see what it can do.

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GREAT VISIONS
by George Ebey

Dear Editor: An encouraging trend in the new Bigger & Better TWS has been noted by a keen-eyed laddie named Ed Cox. "Half of the stories," observes Mr. Cox, "ended rather badly for the hero . . ." *Mene, mene, tekel upharsin!* The hero is getting it in the neck now instead of the reader (half of them, anyway) and, who knows, the trend may continue.

Indeed, I see great visions of future issues: each story ending with the hero impaled on stakes while thousands of ecstatic readers dance in the streets. It is only fair. The heroes, brawny boys from Flatland, have been walking off with the girl, the *gelt* and the Full Life Now & Forever for too many years. The day of compensation has come.

First of all there is "Orig Prem," a short-circuited metal man from the far future. Orig has got to go—I visualize something like this: Orig has been injured in a battle with a pre-Cambrian starfish. His gyro control is all shot; he turns and staggers around and around like a nicked phonogrph record. Then there is an horrendous splash. Whoops! Into the briny, pre-Cambrian deep goes old Orig—to emerge again, several million years later, as a fossil imprint in a lump of coal.

Then there is Oona, the Whost Girl. Oona has just been kidnaped by the Vulgar Men from Betelgeuse and subjected to unimaginable indignities (I can imagine them quite well, tho). Now, as their ether ship streaks through the stardust she peers about, a happy wreck; what will her fate be? And does she care? Eventually she succumbs to attrition and is poked into a rocket tube.

Somebody else can take it from there. There are various ways for the heroes & heroines to substitute for the readers when it comes to slow torture. Other people than me might list those ways. Sing hey! for the Great Turnabout.

Now let me kick the cat off the typewriter, pour out another glass of Mountain White and rip into the body of the October TWS.

Too many short stories, I'm afraid. What I should prefer would be a fifty page novel, two novelets and the rest of the mag devoted to the shorts and dep'ts. Napoli and Stevens I like, particularly the former; Virgil, the Soap Bubble Kid, keeps drawing the same illustration. I suppose it's alright.

The significant thing about Ray Bradbury is his influence on other writers. Whether said influence be benign or malefic I do not know, but there it is, a force to be estimated. Human values over scientific concepts . . . each issue of the Thrilling pubs stresses this general theme and Bradbury leads all the rest in his productions.

The editor shares joint responsibility here. Anyway this is a good thing: all writing should interpret human beings to one another. Unfortunately the tendency of people writing for a living to let their stuff degenerate into stereotypes defeats this purpose. Which is sad and natural.

Leigh Brackett's vanished moon is a good piece of story-telling and *Referent* and *No Summer, No Winter* are fine pieces of writing. These I liked best. Then *Miracle Town*, a pleasant fable. Then Bradbury. Least liked were the works of Burks, Gibson and Smith, but even these were read with interest.

The Reader Speaks overwhelms by force of numbers. Chad: Lord Byron, it is well known, wrote mostly about—Lord Byron! McIntyre: the men in Bradbury's story were not "drunken, careless bums" but normal individuals suddenly free of a great deal of pressure, reacting accordingly. That is the way people act and that is a tribute to Bradbury's writing powers. Editor: Professor Toynbee, whom you praise so highly, believes his own delusions. History is not shaped by an elite minority as he claims, altho it is convenient for certain people to believe this is true.—*4766 Reinhardt Drive, Oakland 2, California.*

Okay, George. But just make very sure it is Professor Toynbee who has the delusions. Sometimes it's a bit hard to tell—though not as hard as you seem to be on Oona. And it's equally hard to determine whether Bradbury is an influence or merely the bellweather of a trend. We incline toward the latter view.

NEW FEMME
by Joyce Kuhn

Dear Editor: First things first, so—as to the cover—pretty throne, huh? I'm talking of the October ish.

THE MOON THAT VANISHED—the plot of man hunting Godly power is old but this story has a unique twist. I like it.

THAT MESS LAST YEAR—words fail me.

GALACTIC HERITAGE—It's oke by me.

I LIKE YOU TOO—not me.

YESTERDAY'S DOORS—has a definite flair—enjoyable reading.

MIRACLE TOWN—confoosin' but amoosin'—one of the best in the book.

THE SQUARE PEGS—the best in the issue—had a whimsical (?) note.

THE COSMIC JACKPOT—I liked it.

DATE LINE—oh, puleeze.

REVERSE ENGLISH—amusing but weak.

SOFTIE—not so hot.

NO WINTER, NO SUMMER—what a revolting idea!

REFERENT—come again?

I like science fiction and fantasy very much and you have one of the best magazines on the market. Oh, mine editor friend, orchids to you.—*Grand Rapids, O.*

Well, okay, we can always use a stray orchid or three. Thanks, Joyce.

REALLY SOMETHING!
by Robert A. Rivenes

Dear Editor: The October TWS is really something. Thirteen stories; three more for two a week.

YESTERDAY'S DOORS gets the top honors for novelets with MIRACLE TOWN last. THE SQUARE PEGS is the best short story. Bradbury is hard to beat. DATE LINE takes last but is pushed by I LIKE YOU, TOO—". YESTERDAY'S DOORS is the best of the serious stories and MIRACLE TOWN tops the humorous efforts. I like good humor as well as the next fellow (maybe more) but the hackneyed exaggerations of B. Miller are not funny. It sounds like some of my material.

The letters of this issue are toot sweet except for the first two. If Stair-railing's letter was good I'd like to see the ones you throw away. Written in crayon, no doubt. Personally, I think that someone should pick up a cranisfor, hit him on his manly fistairis, pick him up by his segunafonce, and throw him on his blubits from the top of the largest cow in K. C.

If EMF thinks it's bad in Wyoming he should try living in Bozeman, Mont., for two years.

Miss Zimmer—A story by Ray B. appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*. That's pulp?

Every time I think of the years I have wasted not reading stf, I want to kick myself. I also want to kick myself for ever starting to read stf. I'm so sore now I can hardly sit down to read my magazine a day. The way I am buying back numbers it would seem I am possessed by an HPL demon. I don't know what it would be like if I read a fanzine.

I'm beginning to wish I was twins. Besides reading stf, Ellery Queen, going to the movies and watching television, I'm trying to get a degree in electrical engineering (Northwestern stfans please note) at N. U. Tech. Ins. To top it all off, Uncle Samuel is after me for a private job of 21 months. Whew!! R. Bradbury—lead me to my asteroid.

Nineteen hundred forty-nine is the year of the first rocket ship to Mars according to Buck Rogers and his author Phil Nowland. This was predicted about fourteen or fifteen years ago. Incidentally, the ship never got to its destination. Ended up at the bottom of some sea. On Mars?

How does one go about preserving the pulps? Is scotch tape any good for repairs? What about trimming the edges?

And please don't have more than twelve stories next ish. There's not enough room for more on my index cards.

No comment of Virg Finley until I make a comprehensive study of his work. I take that back. A word of warning. Don't have an issue without a story with a dream sequence or he's sunk.

Well, back to the June issue to see if the conclusions I've drawn from the letters are correct. I read the

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letters and then go get the back-number to compare the plots as I have reconstructed them from the letters. —*157 N. Euclid Ave., Oak Park, Illinois.*

Okay, okay, Robert, but unless you're dealing them coyly off the arm, how come your math is so faulty, viz. your opening paragraph? Or does your overladen schedule involve an eight-day week? We wait, panting, for some explanation.

The best way to preserve pulps is the same as that used to keep other magazines fresh—have them bound.

MEDAL FOR TEMPLE
by Linda Bowles

Dear Editor: After reading MIRACLE TOWN by Temple, I only wish that I could present him with a medal personally. That is one of the sweetest little yarns I've read in a long time. Isn't Temple a fairly new writer? He has a certain "something" about his stories that makes them warmly human and entertaining. Got any more of his work coming up soon?

This ish had some swell yarns and I won't try to rate them. The three that take the cake for me are—MIRACLE TOWN by William F. Temple, I LIKE YOU, TOO—by Joe Gibson and SOFTIE by Noel Loomis. The rest of the stories were too good to rate the injustice of rating. Therefore, let them fight it out among themselves. I will say that I was somewhat let down by Miss Brackett's story. Nevertheless it was good reading.

I'm even satisfied by Bergey's cover. Something *must* be wrong with me this month. Keep up the good work and more power to you.—*931 North Jackson, Topeka, Kansas.*

Temple is reasonably new to American readers although he has been writing for the English magazines (what there are of them) for years. And you'll be seeing his byline quite regularly in the TWS & SS future, we hope.

JOINING THE DISCUSSION
by Louis G. Wehling

Dear Editors: May I join your discussion of literature and stf? Mr. Oliver states that any story in which the author can make the reader understand the aspect of life the story presents is literature. That is an inefficient definition of literature since the definition would include every dime love story, every dime western and every dime mystery ever written.

What is and what is not literature is very difficult to define, but the most constant quality of writing that can be classed as literature is the attention to the *essence* of an incident rather than the *mechanics* of an incident. Literature can be further, and more generally, defined as that writing which deals with the emotions and psychological concatenation of the human being.

The primary concern of literature is the interior human being (something that is utterly ignored in stf) rather than the circumstantial and the situational. (I am omitting biography and satire in the above opinions.) Choose what stf story you wish and you will find that it emphasizes the circumstantial. It is very possible that a story with stf elements could be written with the attention focused on the interior human being but there is little probability that it would be printed.

As a random example of what I mean let's take Mr. Bradbury's *"Square Pegs"* of your October issue. Speaking as a reader of stf I have nothing but praise for Mr. Bradbury's work, but if Mr. Bradbury's work had been nominated for the title of literature I could hardly concur. *"Square Pegs"* is the work of a man with ingenuity and imagination and it can be fitly classed as the sort of stf story of which we should have more; but it is still situational and circumstantial.

Viewed from a slightly higher perspective, the story in question is revealed as a jig-saw of stereotyped chips whose only virtue is clever assembly. That is the pain of the whole controversy. Let us not call our "idiot child" a genius just because we fathered him.

Why could we not enjoy stf as imaginative writing without attempting to get it on Dr. Eliot's shelf? It is the imagination that is pleased by a good stf story; a bad stf story (*"Reverse English"*) is an unimaginative one. It is a truism that almost every stf reader enjoys weird tales and the only correlation between these two fields is a catering to the imagination.

I plead that we leave stf as imaginative writing, as excellent escape material. To compare *any* stf story with *any* work of Lawrence or Wolfe (as Mr. Oliver suggests) is truly sending the flea after the elephant.—*Box 1197, Corpus Christi, Texas.*

Personally we have a liking for Oliver's fleas and a great deal of respect for Bradbury's chips—they keep turning up blue. But you seem to have a very sound idea of what literature is and we are not going to dig into the files to come up with an stf story or two that fits it. We'll leave that to the readers. Go in and get him, folks.

FIRST TRY
by Stan Madris

Dear Editor: This is certainly the first time I've ever written you and most likely the last. Not that I have any intention of getting the following printed, but it would be nice, pal, chum, friend, etc.

It seems that calling the editor beautiful (to some extent) names, is the only good thing I can say about this mag. I usually have pretty high standards for any book, and I would like to know why anybody, like myself, would want to waste a fourth of a buck on this particular ish.

Bergey sure tried hard enough to make a decent cover but the result was practically nil. The MOON THAT VANISHED sounds like the part of the Odyssey where Homer tries to get out of Hades, or is it back in? YESTERDAY'S DOORS didn't make much sense, while MIRACLE TOWN, the best of the three, had at least a plot. Of the short stories, THAT MESS LAST YEAR, GALACTIC HERITAGE, THE COSMIC JACKPOT, REVERSE ENGLISH, NO WINTER, NO SUMMER, aren't worth anything.

Gibson had a great little story in I LIKE YOU, TOO. One question, tho. At the end of it, what screamed? Bradbury was so so with THE SQUARE PEGS but when is Ray going to write one of his wonderful novels? I honestly hope Benj. Miller continues his series with Orig Prem.

SOFTIE rated with THE SQUARE PEGS, whatever honor that may be. Why I am writing this I don't know, but here's hoping you continue a swell magazine.—*643 South 18th Street, Newark, New Jersey.*

It all sounds very, very vague, Stan. Gibson's screamer was the last Martian, of course. He was about to be dried up by the A-bomb explosion. As we have already said, to us it was as clear as—as—as—well, as glass. Maybe black glass but glass anyway.

GENERAL STUFF
by Pfc. Edwin R. Corley

Dear Ed: Here's Corley back again—bigger and better than ever. Now three giant pages for the same old price, with a free order of French-Fries. Hark! He speaks.

I'm glad—(Pause for applause to die)—I'm glad to see Leigh Brackett back. Does anybody know if she's going to write full-time again, or is she just killing time between movies?

THE MOON THAT VANISHED was top grade. Barking at its heels was MIRACLE TOWN. There were too

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many short stories to review, but I LIKE YOU, TOO—was thought provoking. Joe Gibson—hmm—is this his first story for you?

The best illo was Stevens' pic for MIRACLE TOWN. Cover fair, although Bergey can do better.

The Science Fiction Book Review tells me that Sam Moskowitz and Will Sykora have gone into the publishing game. This news is good news. Both are dyed-in-the-pulp fans from way back and they know what fans like, as illustrated by their first book. Good luck, boys.

Speaking of books, I read one a few days back that is worth mentioning. REBIRTH. It's strictly what the doctor ordered. After the first few chapters dialogue is non-existent. Far from spoiling the book, it enhances it. Worth reading, in pocket book size.

The Reader Speaks.

Skipping through, I see that Captain Slater has a gripe coming. Hope someone can give him a hand. I would *myself*, but I've already got a fellow receiving my used mags.

PERFECT seems to be Jack Bickham's vocabulary. Oh, well, *we can be glad it wasn't divine.*

Corporal Postak calls you a Wheel. You should be flattered. Only people with stars on their shoulders and aged veterans *with eighty years* of service are called *Wheels* around here. I will probably never become a Wheel. Congratulations.

Don't tell me that letter by Ed Cox was only two double-spaced pages. Naughty.

After reading Charles Douglas's letter

i am quite sure
that
don
marquis
is spinning in his
grave

So some of the boys quit reading the stuff because it lost its "KICK". Well, that was probably caused by over-indulgence. I've read stf and fantasy for over eight years, and my interest hasn't waned yet. Maybe I'm a freak.

Let's get on to greener pastures. Like fan activities. If there is anyone who is fool enough to write to me can be assured of receiving an answer. I can write about any subject imaginable, being one of those unfortunates who can get interested in anything. Writing, art and music rank at the top of the list, which extends downward to infinity.

At risk of sticking my neck out a little farther, I will subscribe to any fan publication who sends me a sample edition.

Let's see. Did I forget anything?

Nope.

Oh, yes. Please excuse the typing. Bumble Boogie is blaring in my left ear from a record player and the Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz is rippling gently into my right ear from a radio. My right hand keeps time with the Waltz while the left bounces along with the

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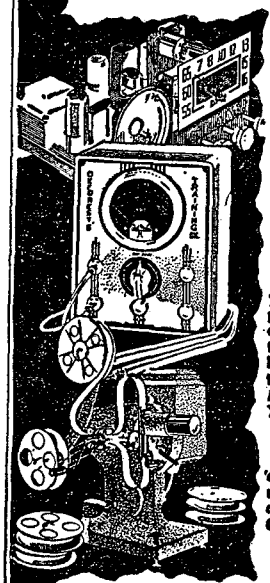

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Cluthe Sons, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey

Boogie. I'm a little confuddled.

And so, as the yellow summer sun sinks behind the locust clouds, we bid fond farewell to the never-never land of TWS.—*Installations Squadron, 62d Airdrome Group, McChord Air Force Base, Tacoma, Washington.*

Yes, THE AVALON COMPANY (Messers Moskowitz and Sykora) is very much in existence and still has copies of Dr. Keller's LIFE EVERLASTING, AND OTHER TALES OF SCIENCE, FANTASY AND HORROR, which is, as we have already stated, a swell job.

Unfortunately, we forgot to give the address of the company in our review, so here it is in case any of you want the book—THE AVALON COMPANY, P. O. Box Number 8052, Clinton Hill Station, Newark 8, New Jersey.

Glad you brought it up, Ed Corley.

CALLING ALL FANS
by William H. Moore

Dear Editor: Thanks for a rather good magazine. Not all the stories are top grade, but then neither are all the oranges in a sack perfect. That just makes the best ones better by comparison. Too, not all readers like the same sort of thing, so it would seem that you are doing a good job in pleasing so many.

My principal reason for wanting to break into print in your column is to call to the attention of yourself and your readers that I am trying to round up all the science-fantasy fans in this part of the country into a more-or-less organized group. In connection with this project, I am planning on publishing a modest "fanzine" called FANTASY POOL that will serve as our news medium and as a contact with other fans across the country.

Should you or any of your readers care to write to me about this group or the 'zine, I'll be most happy to reply at once. First Issue will be available in September, 1948, ten cents a copy or sixty cents a year. A copy will come your way as soon as it is published. —*416 North Beech Street, Little Rock, Arkansas.*

We'll look forward to seeing it and hope it is "rather" good, too. Let us know how you come out, William.

WORK, HE CALLS IT!
by Tom Pace

Dear Editor: If you increase the size of TWS any more, it'll become work to read it . . . work to hold the darn thing up. Seriously all this once a month! (with Startling, that is.) And you rounded up thirteen good tales to fill out all this bulk.

Leigh Brackett, one of the champion chroniclers of far places and distant times, seems to have filled out her writing style a little, subordinated some of the action into equally beautiful, quieter description. I don't know but that I enjoyed her "Veil of Astellar" and "Shadow Over Mars" better, but I'd have to reread them now to know. And I'm 600 miles from my files.

But for color and richness of description, she here rivals C. L. Moore's famous Northwest Smith novelets . . . a hard trick to pull off in anybody's book!

You certainly got together an extraordinary collection of yarns for this issue. *Ten* short stories!

I didn't enjoy the mysticism of Burks' "Yesterday's Doors" too much. Unusual, and well-written (as if I am qualified to say that another man's stuff is well or poorly written . . . just some more fan smuggery!), yes, but it didn't seem to get wherever it was going with me.

Bradbury's "The Square Pegs" and Sterling's' "Referent" hit me in my thinking area though. I think modern Stf is more than justifying its existence

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through the bringing to light of concepts that may some day be the basis of new philosophies . . . maybe the salvation of the race (human, that is) is to be found in the pages of TWS, only we don't know it yet. Some brain picks it up, other ideas act as a catalyst . . . who can say.

"Reverse English" was nice . . . I like gadgetry. "I Like You, Too—" while neatly done up, with right realistic love interest, much better than the mush that gets into most Stf, didn't touch my all-time fave dying-Martian-civilization yarn . . . Kuttner's "To Dust Returneth" in one of the last issues of CAPTAIN FUTURE. Remember that story?

"The Cosmic Jackpot" was good Smith. Loomis' "Softie" was the kind of space-opera I like. The monument on Inscription Rock was the touch that made the story for me. I prefer intergalactic stories to mere interplanetary adventure for some reason . . . maybe it's because I think that the more room the Human race spreads out across, the less likely it is to chew itself to shreds.

"No Winter, No Summer" was darned good. Laverty does a good job of writing. By the way, is there a poem beginning "Points centered in eternal now," and if so, who wrote it?

Bill Temple's "Miracle Town" was an enjoyable novelet . . . but a year ago it couldn't have seen print in any Stf mag, I'll wager. Our literature is becoming more and more such. . . .

If Chad Oliver is playing college football (as I seem to have heard somewhere), then he is beyond a doubt the most literate and deep-thinking fullback in this nation . . . and that includes anything Tech has. Being a former high-school scatback, I have always held the opinion that fullbacks were second only to tackles in brick-headedness. It looks as though I'll have to revise that opinion! Oliver, formerly the foremost apostle of the screwy Stfan letter-writers (Sneary!), writes by far the most adult and interesting letters you print.

So Wrai Ballard likes my middle name, eh? Rhythm, yet! And she's from Dakota. Blanchard. Hmmm. Refer to my preceding paragraph on fullbacks. Thankee, Wrai. *Everybody else expresses pain*

[*Turn page*]

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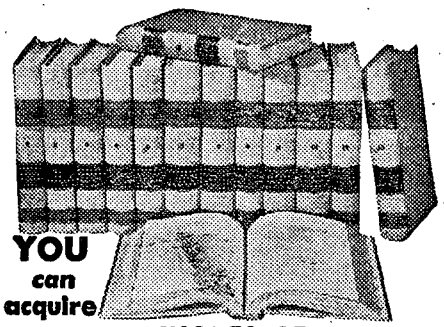

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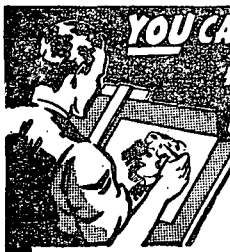

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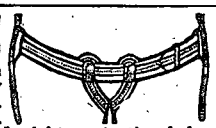

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on hearing my fine old Virginia (—or Carolina . . . or something) name.

What! A *woman* stf fan making cracks about cover girl's chest?

Garvin Berry refers to fans using 'zines to promote racial superiority stuff. Oh Lord. I've only run into one fan with that line of stuff and his stuff was just the usual viciousness of ignorance. There may not be anything I, one Southerner can do . . . but I can keep my own mind clean! Pardon me while I get sick.

This does it for now. 'See' you when STARTLING hits my box.—*Box 403, Georgia Tech, Atlanta, Georgia.*

Do you mean to tell us they play *football* at Georgia Tech? We thought they only played that game at the old Big Three. And if that isn't a fine piece of snobbery, then we've never seen same. Seriously, Tom, a very thought-provoking letter. Let's hope it provokes a few.

USUAL PROCEDURE—HUH?
by Frank Evans Clark

Dear Editor: *WE DID NOT WRITE SOMETHING IN THE TEA!* Do not try to foist such a foul dud upon us. We did not perpetrate such a thing. It was probably Sneary. Our opus was entitled *Vengeance.* We demand a retraction!

We tried to second guess you this time by reading the story that we thought looked best first. We were wrong. We read *Yesterday's Doors* first, but the best story was *I Like You, Too.*

We read somewhere that the usual procedure in an editorial office, the editor being so busy, is to read the first half page and the ending of each manuscript to decide whether it is slush or a Mss. worth reading.

I'm glad you don't follow this procedure, else Gibson's story would have been rapidly ejected and we would have lost the best story of the issue. His beginning was one of the poorest I've seen, and his ending, taken without the rest of the story, meaningless.

"The *Starling* skidded down out of space toward Mars. It was the first ship ever to reach Mars."

Sounds like grade school writing. But, from there on, what a story! I wish I could coin some other word besides "gem" for it. All I can come up with is

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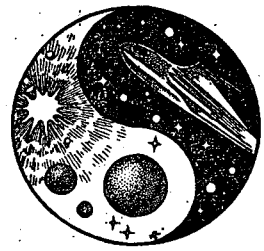

By MURRAY LEINSTER

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"exquisite hand-carved cameo" which hardly seems applicable.

Your newer readers are going to be quite taken with Leigh Brackett's *The Moon That Vanished*. That is, the ones that don't remember the Brackettales of old. It's a fine story, very fine, but not as good as Leigh can do. The Merrittesque flavor of her writing pleased all of us who have learned to look to your publications for this type of writing.

Yesterday's Doors ranks third in this really superlative issue. You were right in answering my last letter by saying that the old-timers, far from being burned out, are eternally capable of turning out a great story. Burks has done just that there. I'd like to see more Racial Memory stories. One of my favorite books is Blackwood's "Julius LeVallon," dealing with the same theme.

Bradbury's *The Square Pegs* ranks next, handicapped by its short length. Very interesting concept. Where could I get one of those asteroids with women?

Didn't like *Miracle Town* or *That Mess Last Year* (is he going to get puns on that! *That Mess Last Issue*, etc.).

Who was the genius who thought of setting the title for *Reverse English* backwards? How does the type for that read in the galleys? O.K.? Or don't you use galleys? Ooops, I mean in the *form*—where the type is upside down and backwards. Reverse English reversed wouldn't be reversed, would it? In the form, I mean.

Is Brett Sterling Edmond Hamilton?

Re: The Cover. That's the softest, warmest back I've ever seen in a picture!

Finlay's art is slipping badly. We were going to congratulate you on the absence of Marchioni, but methinks we see his artwork on page 147, illustrating the "Slow as a Wink" feature. Not bad—for Marchioni.

Trimmed Edges?

I can just imagine the screams of agony that brought forth. "It stood there, staring out at the towering mushroom cloud, flapping its great flippers like some huge monster besieged by all the invisible demons of Hell! And Screamed!

"Screamed!"—*113 Central Avenue, Baldwin, New York.*

You know by this time that Brett Sterling was not Hamilton in the October issue. Bradbury-Sterling go *bragh!* Which winds us up for this trip. We'll be seeing you in this space two months from now and in the March STARTLING STORIES in approximately 28 days. Keep them coming our way—please!

—THE EDITOR.

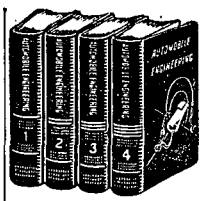
THE HIMALAYCHALET

(Concluded from page 114)

"You understand how it is, dear friends," Shallot-s'hu said when the reading had come to an end and the Venusians were at the door once more. "When evil threatens good, one must mediate between them, one must intervene. Sometimes one must intervene many times. We return tomorrow to help you intervene."

The Venusians went down the escalator, followed by the odor of oily fish. Jick and Oona looked at each other. There was a silence.

"I imagine we can sell this place for quite a lot," Jick said.



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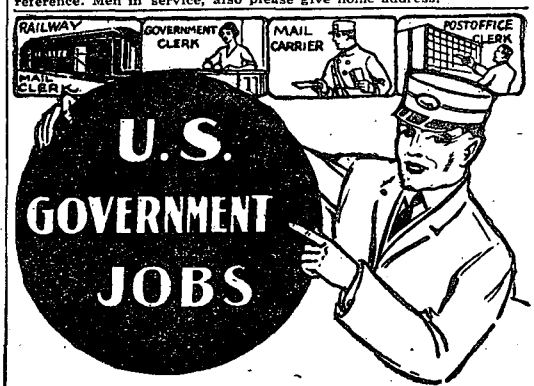

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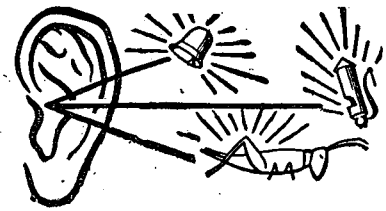

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The FRYING PAN

A REVIEW OF FANZINES

WE'RE opening the current panegyric, not with the flaying alive of a typographical error or a bit of crapulent verse, but with the opening two paragraphs of an article by Arthur Rapp in the opening issue of a fanzine called CHRONOSCOPE—said article entitled "Flaming Fans."

Says Mr. Rapp—

Another cherished illusion shattered by the rash facts of reality! Sobbing quietly I replace on their shelves the time-faded copies. . . Are these the magazines that have inspired so many tear-jerking panegyrics from nostalgic ancients? Are these insipid hacky effusions the tales that have been enshrined in golden mysticism with the magic words, "The Good Old Days"?

Immediately arises the question, how did the superb craftsman and delicate enchantment of current pulp science fiction arise from the earlier sagas of stereotyped characters dwindling into atomic-sized universes amid plots packed with improbably lush coincidence? Did the sheen of gold—increases in the cents-per-word rates—inspire authors to outdo themselves? Unlikely, for the rates of *all* . . . have gone up since the depression.

Mr. Rapp gives the lion's share of the credit to the science fiction fan—that remarkably articulate, frequently querulous, occasionally absurd creature who manages to make his news and views evident in the most cloistered of editorial offices where science fiction is purveyed.

Not all the old fiction in science fiction was low grade ore, of course. If it were, our Hall of Fame reprint policy in our companion magazine, STARTLING STORIES, would have been up the spout long since. Nor is all

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the fiction published today of uniform high satisfaction to editor, fan or general reader.

But the improvement has been remarkable in the last five to ten years. And that it should be so noticed and remarked upon gives us a certain degree of satisfaction for any small role we may have played in this upsurge. The fan deserves credit, yes—but we think the bulk of the honors must go to all of American humanity for its vitally increased interest in scientific subjects generally.

Without it, the able group of imaginative and sensitive new writers who have been more and more turning their talents toward science fiction would never have become interested in the field. Nor would there have been an imaginative and receptive public of sufficient size to make their efforts even modestly worth while. It is our opinion that a surprising number of people have been growing up under the pressure of today's unhappy world to a point where they have minds sufficiently open to appreciate science fiction.

Better, as the old proverb says, late than never. . . .

Cliff Hangers

There is an old situation in bang bang fiction which dates back to the heyday of the old British "thriller"—a weekly publication which featured in serial form, sometimes for decades on end, the adventures of some fantastically gifted sleuth who could be counted upon to extricate himself with insouscience from the direst of cliff hanging situations.

On one occasion the author of such a serial went on strike for a higher stipend and was told to take a nice long leap for himself. Always, heretofore, mere authors of such staple fiction had been regarded as interchangeable parts. The publisher simply called in a more tractable hack and told him to take over.

However, on this occasion, the striking writer had set and primed a booby trap for his successor. His hero had been left chained to a railroad track in a desolate region with no one around to save him and the train chug-chugging down on top of him at a frightful rate of speed.

The new author hemmed and hawed and sweated and strained and finally gave up. The deadline was closer than the train to the hero and the publisher did a bit of huffing on his own, finally calling in the first author,

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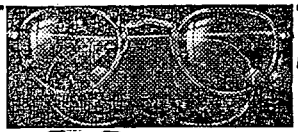

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giving him his raise and telling him all was forgiven. Publisher, editors and office boys gathered around the typewriter as the victorious author sat down to solve his hero's insolvable dilemma.

The author smiled easily, inserted a piece of paper and type—"With a superhuman effort he burst his bonds. . . ."

So when, in a story entitled (original—what?) SUSPENSE in a magazine named THE STFANATIC, edited, published, printed and "partially written," by one Hugh McInnis, we ran across a somewhat similar situation at the beginning of installment #2, we read on with bated breath.

According to the "Sunopsis" Stacy Richard, "a young lieutenant in the Tellurian Space Patrol, is kidnapped in the Venusian City of Braekh. He awakes to find himself strapped to an operating table in a space ship which is very plainly in flight. He is confronted by a stranger who says that he is the notorious Profesor Deitz. The man continues: "Not *is*, Lieutenant, *was*. I escaped only a month ago. . . ."

From there on in it becomes apparent that the somewhat zany Dr. Deitz is about to perform an horrendous operation on young Stacy. We wondered how he was going to get out of *that*. And then came the anti-climax. Dr. Deitz left the room, turning out the light to keep down the electric bill, and an unseen confederate of our Space Patrolman, came in and unstrapped him.

Sissy stuff, we calls it.

Neo-Metrical Geometry

Another newcomer, called THE FANTOPOLOGIST, edited by one H. T. McAdams of Bethalto, Illinois, which deals in "non-metrical" geometry for reasons known only to Mr. McAdams, heads an explantory article entitled TOPOLOGY, NUMBER AND WHAT WE ALL (a bit surrealist, that) with the following—

> This article will attempt to show that the concept of dimension is largely a man-made artificial one, particularly as to its limitation in number to three. . .

Honestly, did anyone ever think it was anything else? We ask you!

And in another new fanzine—we seem to

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be dealing chiefly with neophytes this time out—published by Gordon Mack, Jr., of Lake Arthur, Louisiana, and called KOTAN, Jon Gordon comes up with the following bit of verse—

OFFERING

The temple was dimly lit,
And the corridors reeked of strange incense
Whose smoke-fumes wildly danced
To melodies so ancient.

She was lying on the altar
Bound and helpless.
The priest raised outstretched arms
To pray—

A wild scream rang through the night
When the sacred blade crashed down.

Which for some reason strikes us funny, especially that "melodies so ancient" part. What else do you hear these days?

The Fanscient

Our final chuckle comes from a solidly established if midget fanzine put out by Don Day in Portland, Oregon, and entitled THE FANSCIENT. Norm Storer writes the opening editorial in the current edition and says—

Have you ever felt the wish to be in the locale of some of those stories you read? I mean, did you ever wish that you, like the hero, could sit in a night-club on Luna or picnic on Mars. . . .?

We knew darned well that if enough authors kept writing about bar-grills on the moon something like this would happen. And as for picnics—on any planet—we leave you the ants, Martian, Tellurian or whatnot. Like Spivvy, of *New York* night-club fame and the record, "I like town." So be it.

—THE EDITOR.

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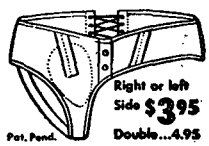

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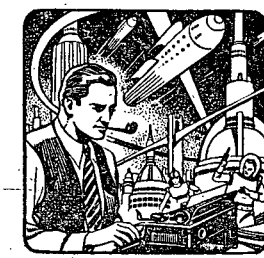
SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

APE AND ESSENCE, by Aldous Huxley, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York ($2.50).

Encased in the shell of a supposedly posthumous scenario which falls off the rear end of a Hollywood studio truck engaged in taking unsolicited screen plays to the incinerator, Mr. Huxley tells the story of Dr. Alfred Poole, D.Sc., known to his colleagues as "Stagnant" Poole, who comes to Los Angeles on an expedition from New Zealand, one of the few corners of the world that has escaped the wreckage of the atomic war.

Dr. Poole is kidnapped by some of the natives and finds himself in a bewildering re-



trogression of "civilization," dedicated to Belial and the destruction of everything productive and virtuous—for, as the eunuch priests are careful to explain, the worship of God and virtue has proven irrevocably destructive to the species.

His experiences in this negative pantheism are shocking, funny and terrifying by turns but never fail to be thought provoking. Invited to join the priesthood, Dr. Poole reneges because of his love for an atavistic hunk of female named Loola, whose own instincts are a source of peril as great as his.

Due to the after-effects of atomic radiation, men and women are permitted to make love only once a year over a festival period—and in the most public and primitive fashion. For the rest of the time love is strictly tabu and is usually rewarded by a live interring for the lovers.

Dr. Poole's inhibitions take a nose-dive as his determination to live with Loola what he conceives as a normal life rises. And in the finale we see the lovers making painful pro-

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gress across the Sacramento desert to join an exiled colony of "Hots," as those who indulge in the luxury of affection out of season are contemptuously called.

The imagery is grotesque, imaginative and mordantly witty throughout—as in one symbolic scene where we see armies of apes being drawn into battle on carts with Einsteins between the traces. Probably Mr. Huxley's best since the memorable "After Many a Summer Dies the Swan." A must for stf readers.

THE LUNGFISH, THE DODO AND THE UNICORN, by Willy Ley, The Viking Press, New York ($3.75).

An enlarged and much revised edition of Mr. Ley's great study of marginal zoology, paleontology and botany, which was first published in 1941 and became over the intervening span of years a war casualty.

Do you want to know about the dragon or the unicorn, the kraken or what really happened to the Aurochs—or whether some dinosaurs may still survive? If you do—and who doesn't—this book is your meat.

Skillfully classified in three sections it deals first with mythological monsters and their sources in history and paleontology, next with such species as the dodo, the great auk and the giant sloth, which have become extinct, like the European bison within the memory of mankind, and finally with strange survivors from supposedly dead geologic era like the Australian marsupials, the okapi and the aardvark.

Mr. Ley has managed to walk a difficult tightrope between scientific pedantry and the light touch without ever doing a fallen sponge cake or lapsing into the ridiculous or flippant. All in all, one of the most fascinating volumes we have read on this and allied subjects.

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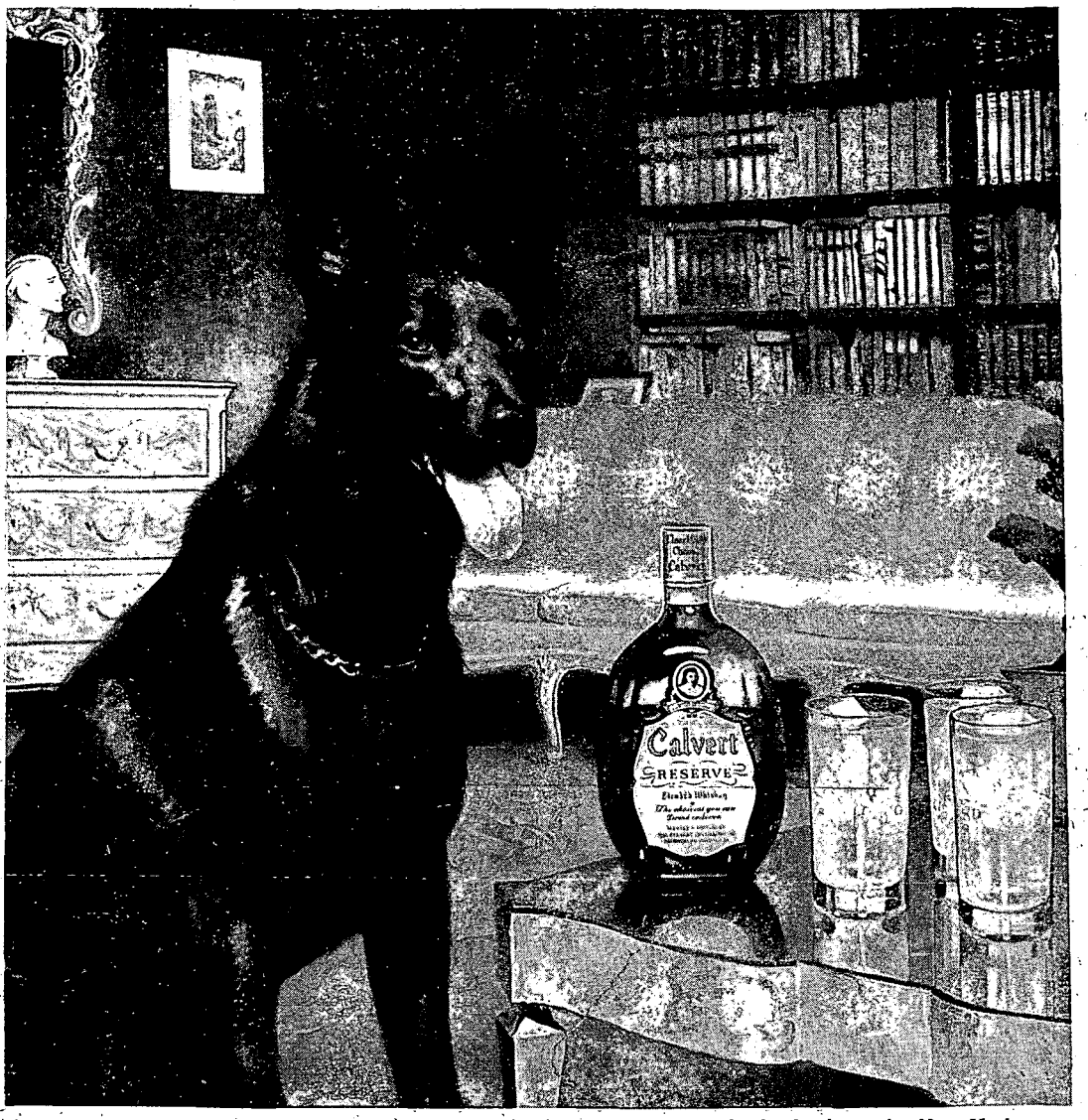

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